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MAMMOTH Adventure

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The Khalifa ruled a quarter of Africa, and much of the dark continent's darkness was due to him.

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Salomey knew murder when she saw it—but in a courtroom she also knew that she was a woman.

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "Traders In Death."

MAMMOTH ADVENTURE SEPTEMBER 1946

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Volume 1 Number 2

The Editor's Page

SEVERAL months ago, when we were working on the first issue of MAMMOTH ADVENTURE, we sent out a call to authors for material for the new book, and August Lenniger, who agents for E. Hoffman Price, sent us the first few chapters and a synopsis of something Price was doing. We okayed them, and set a deadline—which Price beat by two weeks, by the way—and scheduled the story for this issue. We didn't have time to feature it on the cover, so we have the unusual happenstance of presenting you with a terrific novel without the slightest toot of a fanfare. "Father Of The Scourge" is one of those historically accurate novels that a really good author like Price sweats over with more than the usual amount of blood and tears. But when you read it, you'll see that the work has paid off in literary dividends. Here's a book-length you'll really enjoy. Top adventure stuff, we say!

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN comes back from his amazingly well-received short appearance in the first issue with a slightly longer story called "Rat Race In Rio" which is written with the typical McGivern flair. You should like this as well as you did the yarn about "Pistol Packing Papa."

"ASSIGNMENT Barcelona" is the title of a yarn by H. B. Hickey (who just recently sold a story to *Liberty* because we urged him to try!) and for a writer who just began writing some six months ago, you'll agree he has a future all mapped out for him. We hope he'll be with us a long time!

W. W. KORTE gives us one of those O. Henry type yarns with "The Witness." And you'll agree that it has a deep human significance in it that is more than just a "fiction device." This one will linger with you a long time as an "effect" rather than a story. It's the kind of a thing that hits you between the eyes.

"TRADERS In Death" by Alexander Blade, besides being the cover story, rounds out the issue with the proper variety. There are a couple of dames in this yarn you'll give the old up and down and we don't mean maybe. Blade has a way of making us hate a character, or love him (or her) which leaves us at "30" with the taste of realism in our mouths.

DWIGHT V. SWAIN, who wrote some fine yarns for our sister magazines, *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* before Uncle Sam decided he would make a good warrior, has been demobilized, and now he's getting back into the swing of things with manuscripts—and like the cautious fellow he is, starts out with an article, a true fact story on a character called "Jungle Napoleon." We think you'll like this true story of a real adventurer, we'll promise more of the same in future issues (by Swain and others).

OLLIE READ, who is editor of our big-brother magazine, *Radio News*, will be at Kwajalein during the July atom bomb experiments, and we expect that he will bring back many an interesting anecdote in adventure. That is, (as we keep on telling him), if he comes back at all. Now there's an adventure your editor wants none of. Atom bombs are too unpredictable for our money to go "steady." As a matter of fact, we have a date 12,000 miles away from Bikini at the time. No further because at the moment we can't get to the Moon! By the way, how long will it be before trips to the Moon will just be "adventure" stories for fact articles in MAMMOTH ADVENTURE?

IF YOU like MAMMOTH ADVENTURE, that ought to be a tip to you to look up a couple of magazines titled *Mammoth Western*, *Mammoth Mystery* and *Mammoth Detective*. Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, publishers of this magazine, are responsible for all of them, and the same policy of "only the best" is followed all the way through.

SPEAKING of unusual adventure, have you had a chance to pick up a copy of the Ziff-Davis magazine *Amazing Stories?* It has been featuring the writings of a man who claims to have visited an underground race of people who inhabit tremendous cities as much as four miles underground, and who have a super-civilization of machines with which they more or less control the surface world, even so far as to influencing politicians with what is called a "telaug" or mental telepathy augmentation beam. The weird part of these published stories is made more interesting by the fact that thousands of readers write in and claim similar experiences, that is, claim to be affected by "rays" which they attribute to anything from the FBI to gnomes and elves. Even our daily newspapers have carried stories of actual people who "sue the FBI" for "raying" them.

NEXT issue, which will be on sale September 9, will contain a really imposing list of stories and authors. We won't have a novel, but the reason is going to be obvious to you when you begin to read—you'll find that your editors received, at about the same time, such a collection of fine short stories that he didn't have the heart to hold any of them over. In other words, we're giving you "the works" and hoping you can take a lot of good in one package! See you then. *Rap*

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FATHER OF THE SCOURGE

By E. Hoffman Price

Africa was not a healthy place for a white man when the Khalifa Abdullahi, the smiling slayer, ruled a full quarter of the continent of sudden death

The Khalifa traced out his plan for ambush with the tip of his spear. "We will cut them to pieces!"

SIMON CARVER said to the smiling slayer who ruled nearly a quarter of Africa, "What if the British do get to Berber, they'll not keep me from bringing you more ammunition! Give me the order, and I'll head for the coast, today. And come back."

Abdullahi the Khalifa fingered his graying, scanty fringe of beard, and with his broad-bladed spear traced lines on the rammed earth floor at the foot of his couch. The four turbanned secretaries, sitting at Carver's left front, looked up from their pads of paper and saucers of ink-soaked cotton, but the lord of the Soudan was not yet ready to dictate. He said, "We cut them to pieces with swords at Abou Klea. Without cartridges, we broke the square, and lo, the slaying! Victory comes from Allah!"

"He, the Living, the Everlasting!" Carver recited, and the secretaries echoed his pious words. Then, picking up his hippopotamus hide whip, he traced a route on the floor. "There is a way, like this. Even if the British take Shendi, or come up the Nile as far as Shabluka, I'll get through. But it is a hard way, yea, the road of death, and the road of devils."

The Khalifa grasped the carved spear shaft at its balance, and thumped the butt on the frame of his couch. A winning smile showed his fine white teeth, and took all the hardness from his big mouth. It put pleasant little

wrinkles on the sides of his hooked Arab nose, and it made one overlook the disfiguring smallpox scars of his light brown face. This man for whose sake three million Africans and some thousands of whites had died looked neither fierce nor fanatical nor bitter.

"There be fewer than thirty thousand coming up the Nile with Kitchener. After we've cut them to pieces at Kerreri, we'll march on into Egypt. Simon, be one of my *emirs*. Thou and I, we understand each other."

Outside, drums began to roll and rumble. Trumpets hollowed from elephant tusks bawled and bellowed like prehistoric monsters; the mighty braying of those *ombayas* made the earth shake under Carver. But this was not the call to battle.

Chains clinked, and all the black men and all the brown men of Omdurman mumbled and muttered. There was a woman's wailing, abruptly stilled. A man raised his voice: "Yea, this is my day of days, and death comes to every man, behold how I meet it!"

There were other declarations, and the sad clink-clink of heavy links accented the unshaken voices of men who would soon know the fullness of Allah's mercy, and were not afraid. Yea, Allah's mercy, for the Khalifa had none.

Distance diluted the sounds as the doomed column filed on toward the plaza. Meanwhile, slayer and slave trader, each great after his own kind, sat regarding each other, and when the braying of the elephant tusk trumpets no longer shook the room, the Khalifa repeated, "Be one of my *emirs*, and lead one of my armies to the prophesied battle ground."

The offer was tempting, yet behind that engaging, that winning smile which sometimes made the Khalifa seem a little like the saint whose kingdom he had inherited, lurked possibilities which Simon Carver carefully weighed. Thirteen years of slave trading in the Soudan had made him fit for commanding Darvish soldiers, but that same experience had taught him the danger of being a ruler's favorite.

To say in the face of four secretaries and in the hearing of devoted guards, "Be one of my *emirs*," could well be a left handed way of having a man speared even before he left Omdurman, that sprawling, stinking city gathered about the high domed tomb of the divinely sent Mandi of Allah: since whoever the Khalifa exalted, others would hate him.

FOR thirteen years, Simon Carver, unreconstructed rebel from Marietta, Georgia, had smuggled cartridges to Omdurman, taking payment in slaves, since the Khalifa did not have cash. And now that Kitchener was building a railroad, and the prophesied battle approached, it might not seem good to the Darvishes to let Carver leave with all that he knew of Omdurman, and of its 60,000 death-loving devotees, and the tale of their armament, their strength, and their weakness. As things stood now, the renegade might profit by serving his own people.

So make this man a high commander, that someone skipped in promotion would spear him and leave him to lie unnoticed among the dead dogs, the dead donkeys, and the other dead things which the street cleaners pushed from the broad avenues and into alleys before feast days.

"The honor is too much," Carver said, at the end of the long pause which courtesy required when one considered the Khalifa's words. He fingered the sweat seasoned handle of the *kurbaj* with which he had whipped so many slaves across the desert, then went on. "Who am I to lead the faith-

ful? I'm only a convert, not born a Moslem."

"You have stood the test of faith, of holy war, fighting by bringing me what I need for warfare. And obedience. And poverty."

He spoke the last word without irony, though where once his tunic had been of coarse cotton, with the symbolical patches cut from rags, his *jubba* and baggy trousers were now the finest that the looms of Hindustan could offer, and so was the turban cloth wound about his silken skullcap. There was silver on his heavy hafted dagger, and gold on its J-shaped Yamani scabbard. The Khalifa's poverty, Simon Carver's poverty, they were of the same piece: figures of speech kept alive out of respect to tradition.

Carver answered in the Arabic he had spoken for so long that it had become more natural than his almost forgotten English, "I am the least of the slaves, and not large enough to be a prince among princes. May Allah not let your generosity become less, nor take from me the gift of bringing one more load of cartridges. Yea, though all my men and all my camels die, and I bring only what I carry between my two hands."

Though the Khalifa trusted no man, and believed none, flattery pleased him. He began to dictate an export license for a batch of slaves, since the trade was a government monopoly. When the paper was sealed, Carver bowed and kissed it, and then kissed the Khalifa's hand: for lips seeking the taste of vengeance must first endure all other tastes.

"You have permission to leave," the Khalifa said, and Carver went to take choice of the slaves he would send across the Red Sea to be sold in Arabia, a land not ruined by Abolitionists.

Carpet baggers had killed Carver's father, so that Simon's gun play had won him nothing but the necessity of leaving the reconstructed south. Fifteen years old, with fuzz on his chin, instead of a wiry black beard; a face smooth, not weathered by the fury of the desert, nor yet furrowed with wrath which by now had tanned him from within. And now British abolitionists were coming up the Nile to meddle.

SO CARVER rode down the broad avenue, with Hadendowa spearmen behind him. Their hair was lime-bleached to a rust red, and stiffened with butter and clay, and curled. Their shoulders were broad as palace gates, and their hips were contained by a scrap of cloth; these men, shaped like wedges, might have stepped from an Egyptian tomb painting. Their lips were thin, and their noses were neither flat nor broad; and in their speech they used words that came from the tongue of Forgotten Egypt.

Maryam had told him this, and she was the daughter of those people whose pure blood came from the days of the Pharaohs; a Coptic lady, with eyes very dark and very large, and shaped like almonds, and with lashes so long and thick that they made a black line along the eyelids. And for these thirteen years, Maryam had helped him hate his own people, all of them but one, and her he had almost forgotten.

Maryam was as white as Irene, and of far more ancient race. There have been less lovely paths to vengeance, and Maryam was good in her own right.

The cream colored dome of the Mahdi's tomb swelled splendidly against a stark blue sky. Ragged spearmen coming in from Kordofan knelt in the dust of the threshold, and washed their hands with the dust, and their faces, and bowed their heads, not in prayer

to the dead Saint, but because the holy ground where he lay would add force to their devotions.

Carver's mare snorted and tossed her head at the fresh blood smell which the hot wind brought from the execution grounds. He whispered to her, and stroked her neck, and she remembered that she was a lady, and like Maryam, of ancient race.

At the end of the avenue, overlooking the Nile, was the slave market. There an Arab dealer tried to palm off splendid looking weak ones, but Carver could examine a recruit in far less time than any army surgeon, and with less chance of error. His early mistakes had cut many a thousand dollars from his hoard in Suakin.

After ferrying his merchandise and his cream colored camels across the Nile, Carver led the caravan among *dom* palms. The black slaves sang, for it was good to go into lands where a man paid no taxes, and no Darvish captain scourged him for tribute he could not give.

"Now all men know we have nothing," the leader chanted.

"Now they can take only nothing," the other answered in chorus.

Aieee . . . . yeaaaaa . . . . aieeeeee . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing . . .

A good beat, a good stride. The leader was well picked. Carver cracked the *kurbaj,* and the stragglers stretched their legs. He'd not touched any man's hide. Only a fool flays his Niggers needlessly. The worse they're run down, the less the Arabs'll pay. His father, back in Georgia, had been good to his slaves, and so was Simon, insofar as he could. After all, he shared their hardships on the march, and in Arabia they were sold into a life far better than they'd ever known at home.

Carver considered himself a benefactor: and this sincere conviction heightened his fury against the British, who had put a price on the head of every slave runner.

Then, beyond the palms and the *dhurra* fields, he saw the desert. Its glare and its hot breath mocked him. Whatever he won from taking that short cut would be no bargain. So he cracked his whip, and cursed Kitchener, and hoped that not too many of his men would drop before they reached Suakin and the Red Sea . . .

CHAPTER II

CARVER did reach Suakin, and the first sight of that dreary town told him and his men that Allah still worked miracles: that they would have their fill of water and of food, and that all the wrath was behind them.

From afar they saw houses built of white coral, rising two and three, and some, five storeys high, from the small island, just offshore which was filled to bursting with Suakin. But the town came ashore, as if to meet Carver, and sprawled out into a suburb largely of straw huts, though there was a mosque, and the long vacant house of Osman Digna, the Khalifa's lieutenant.

As with Carver, there was a price on Osman Digna's head, for he had tricked many a soldier to his death, out in that thorn-carpeted waste. Each new commander of the garrison had ideas on how to capture Osman Digna, who had fought more and retreated faster than any man in the Soudan: but, gray and sixty, he still had his head.

Carver, seeing the roof of the wily old fellow's house, got new strength for his body, and for his resolution. Maybe he should have accepted the Khalifa's offer, and taken his chances on matching Osman Digna's fame.

Gatling guns poked their snouts from

embrasures in the fifteen foot brick wall which made a crescent about el-Kaff suburb. Krupp guns lurked in each bastion, ready to blast the near half of the desert between them and the hills, seven miles inland, and blocking the horizon. Perhaps two thousand yards beyond the wall was the greenish smudge which marked the well. Two blockhouses guarded Suakin's water supply, though a distilling plant on the island could take care of the town's bare necessities.

Melons did well in the sandy soil, and so did *dhurra*. For the rest, there was mimosa, delicate green, and with two-inch thorns that would pierce a boot. Colcynth bore its melon shaped fruit, bitter and acrid. This was largely a waste good for no one but Osman Digna, who knew how to live and fight in it.

However, there were some others who in their quiet way found use for that thorn cluttered hell. These were buried in the eight battle sites within binocular range of the town; and with so much room for more graves, no one was crowded. Osman Digna could not without artillery take Suakin, and if the garrison commanders had been content to let it go at that, they could have saved themselves embarrassing explanations concerning the punishment taken by punitive expeditions.

Egyptian gendarmes in blue uniforms hailed the caravan. Murad Ali, the chief of police, smiled all over his oily face. A slave was to be seized and emanciuated at once. The governor was to enforce this law, and rigidly, yet Carver marched them in, and publicly.

Each weary black carried a little bale of goods. He was a porter who brought merchandise from, well, let us say, Kassala, which wasn't enemy country. But don't forget to give the *vakeel* two napoleons per head, and Murad Ali, one napoleon: or there'd be seizures, arrests, and grand publicity, too.

And when the slaves were shipped out, don't forget the port captain, otherwise, it might occur to that shrewd fellow that forty black "sailors" made too big a crew for one swift running Arab *dhow*.

It was just that simple, if you were a man of firm character.

CARVER turned things over to Saoud, chief of his Hadendowas, and went to his house in el-Kaff. Allah, it was good to be home! He wondered if he had earned only a profit, or whether he had also saved his head by taking Omdurman so much valuable merchandise that the Khalifa had felt sure that Carver would not be rushing to tell Kitchener about the state of the Darvish army and capital. . . .

Servants salaamed. They were glad to see the master.

They scrubbed him and they massaged him and they brought him steaming cups of *keshir* spices with ginger. Eyes closed until his lashes made a haze before his vision, he drew at the stem of the narghileh, and heard music in the languid *gurgle-gurgle-glug-glug* as the smoke of 'Ajami tobacco came up out of the water, and trickled through the snake-like tube he had twined in a half-hitch about his wrist. There was no tobacco quite like 'Ajami when a good pipe-servant soaked it, wrung it dry, heaped it up, and laid atop the hillock a chunk of glowing charcoal.

When he had finished eating buttered rice, and most of a lamb, diced and grilled on skewers, the woman who had been waiting behind the Boukharan door-hangings came out with a brass basin, and a brass jug. She was slender, and for all the shapelessness of her

black gown, it was nevertheless plain that she was well formed. No garment could have disguised her grace when she set out the basin, and knelt to pour water over his hands.

This was Maryam, who had been taught that it was not fitting for a woman to be in a man's presence when he ate. As for eating with him, that would have been rank impropriety, appropriate in the straw huts of the tribesmen, but not in this house. And Carver from years of habit had come to accept that belief.

He had once considered Maryam's cheek bones just prominent enough to be delightfully foreign; piquante was the word. They were exquisitely right, with that fine and high bridged nose, curved, but neither "Roman" nor Semitic. From the cheek bones down, her face tapered to a dainty chin that was neither weak nor pointed. She still reminded him, after fourteen years, of that alabaster head of Queen Hatshepsu, but this resemblance had long since ceased to thrill him, for in a deeply buried, half conscious way, he hated Maryam whose mere existence, linked necessarily with his, had forced him into his way of life.

The almond shaped eyes at first seemed strangely large for that high bred face, until of a sudden, they became proper, just as from looking long enough at Egyptian frescos, the formal posture, the eye unnaturally large and unnaturally in profile became natural. Just as hating one's own people, or flogging slaves over the hot sand finally became natural.

Only a little coryllium darkened her eyelids, and no cosmetic could have blackened or thickened the dense long lashes. She was nowhere tatooed, neither forehead nor back of the hand; her palms, however, were orange from henna, and so were the soles of her small, bare feet.

The "double crown," and her gleaming black hair done in a multitude of small, tight curls, would have made a startling illusion, but Maryam knew when to stop. Kneeling there, motionless beautiful, that was sufficient.

Carver wiped his hands and stretched from the waist, and drew a deeper breath than he imagined possible.

Maryam smiled, secretively and withholdingly as Carver had smiled at the Khalifa. With Maryam, it was from instinct rather than a necessity, yet it was far from clear whether she had learned it from him, or he from her.

"It is good to come back from death."

Maryam's words expressed so precisely what he had been thinking, that he inclined his head as though part of a ritual.

"It was for some days uncertain," he admitted.

OUTSIDE, a goat bleated. Dogs worried carrion in dark alleys. A small drum thump-thump-thumped, and Somali sailors droned an endless chant about a girl in Berbera. . . . These things were made remote by the high thick walls of courtyard and house, and they intruded only enough to make comfort and security more luxurious.

"But you come to meet an enemy, he is waiting for you."

Carver's lids lifted enough to look into Maryam's cryptic eyes, and to see that this was no time to say, "*Bukra! Bukra!* Save it till tomorrow!"

Instead, "The gendarmes did give me odd looks. But you tell me."

Maryam had always been telling him.

After some years in Egypt, a fugitive and a beggar, Simon became an undercover agent in the service of Sir Evelyn

Baring, the British Consul General, who advised the Khedive on reorganizing the government of bankrupt and lawless Egypt. And Simon was by then speaking Arabic as a native; moreover, among the mixed Egyptian population, nothing about his face or color nor speech contradicted his being an *"effendi":* mister, esquire, finally, any Turkish subject who could write his own name. Thus he had been able to go about secret Cairo, and learn what the Consul General had to know.

But for such work, it had been necessary to live in native Cairo, not merely prowl, and there was no quarter whose *shaykh* would tolerate, for more than a few days, anything as iniquitous as a bachelor. Get a wife—get a female slave—or get out before you are taken out in fragments. Hence Maryam.

While Carver worked the coffee houses, Maryam gossiped with women in the *souk,* and in the baths, and in their houses, in the rooms where not even the master of the house might enter without first crying *"Destour!"* to warn the unveiled visitors of his own womenfolk. Without Maryam, Carver would have been not even the shadow of an agent, so from respect for the power of gossip and from ancient habit, he encouraged her: "Tell me, then, those who muttered about my enemy didn't say enough. And I could hardly act worried and ask them."

"The infidel, Harrod Flint, that one who took your office in Cairo, he is in Suakin. Yea, the spoiler, the dung of Satan, the envier who envied, he is come to town."

So Harrod Flint, that double-dealer, had come to town, and certainly neither for health, nor for pleasure. Still, if all the slave trading *pashas,* all the bribe taking clerks and officials, all traitors on the Egyptian government payroll had been taken away, the feet of the few remaining inhabitants would have made disturbing echoes in the emptiness of the island city.

"Who's he looking for?"

"Father of the Kurbaj, when a man goes to hell, does he not first call on Satan?"

"But he can't be looking for me! Even if the fool did poke his head into el-Kaff, the *vakeel* wouldn't help him, the chief of police would block him, they'd lose money if anyone arrested me! There's not an official in the whole town that wouldn't rather cut a special agent's throat than give him a hand!"

Maryam remembered how, fourteen years past, Carver had gone to Suakin on a special mission from Cairo: and how the vakeel, the *Khedive's* own representative, had made two attempts to murder him lest he return to render a report of the town's corruption. She said, "Harrod Flint is a smart man. And God loves him, or he would long since be dead." She paused, and then went on, in a tone as oblique as her antique eyes, "Yea, that Flint has always been a cunning man, my lord."

And she smiled secretively when she read the hardening of Carver's face; she knew he was once more eating bitterness, and she was glad.

CARVER was again picturing undercover days, and Irene Marland, and how Irene's father had assured them that whether they married and remained in Egypt, or went back to the States, they had his blessing. Warmed by well earned official praise, Carver had decided to withhold his resignation until a successor could be found.

Maryam? While she had shared his house, the arrangement had been planned as a matter of duty, rather than of permanency; and while she was white, and of ancient race, she was not

of his own people, and not like Irene.

Maryam, herself a Coptic Christian, didn't even know Carver was not a Moslem by birth. And the beautifully simple Moslem formula of divorce would leave her the lady of a substantial house, and whatever welcome she desired of her own people. No injustice; nothing to talk over; so while he waited, Carver kept his own counsel, after the manner of Egypt. . . .

Then came an order, dripping with righteousness; undercover agents would at once break off all "irregular" connections with "native" women, since such irregularities were a scandal to the service, and a blot on a Christian nation. This from the same office which had told novices why a monastic agent in the native Cairo would last a week, unless he got his throat cut sooner.

Harrod Flint, Carver's junior, came begging advice, and tearing his hair. Carver said, "Why, you idiot, you're supposed to move the lady into another house, for the time being. There'll be an official inspection. It'll be clearly proved that there was not a grain of truth in the reports which agitated the pious old women of the London Anti-Vice Society."

So he helped the novice in diverse ways.

And then, inexplicably, the investigators inspected the wrong house, exposing Carver. Everyone was publicly shocked. Everyone, especially Harrod Flint, was privately grieved. "Too bad, old man. . . . Afraid they'll do their best to make a black example. . . . Brass hats actually happy they got someone, it'll put them in the light of honoring the Vice Society in good faith . . ."

And so it was. Carver didn't try to make official explanations. He was certain that only Harrod Flint could have exposed the trick, and that protest would be useless. He did however try to explain to Irene how duty made strange demands, but she sent him back to his "Negro wench." Carver did not improve matters when for farewell he retorted, "She's white as you are, and even if she weren't, she'd not turn against me to yelp with the crowd!"

All that came back to Carver as he listened. "He must be a smart man," Maryam repeated, with an inflection which was good as proof that Harrod Flint had betrayed a friend to create a vacancy and win promotion.

Then Maryam twisted until she could reach the broad leaves of 'Ajami, ripe brown, and freckled. As he watched her strip and shred the tobacco, Carver was thrilled by the prospect of meeting Harrod Flint.

It was hardly probable, though certainly not impossible, that the Khalifa could defeat Kitchener's modern army, which was supplied by the newly built railroad. If the British won, the slave trade was finished: a circle would have been completed, and the Soudan would hear no more of the Father of the Scourge. There would only be Simon Carver, starting out anew.

Thus to meet the man whose treachery had prodded Carver into the slave trade added to the impending completeness. He said to Maryam, "He'll not be looking for me. I'll go to find him, and the power is with Allah!"

CHAPTER III

BEARD oiled and truculently outthrust, prolonging the jut of his chin, accenting the harsh angles of his face and the angled beak of his nose; white turban high, even among Hadendowas, tall men whose buttered curls added to their height; a silver hafted Yamani *jambia* at his belt, and a heavy Colt discreetly nestled at his armpit:

Carver stalked the hundred yard stretch of causeway which led from mainland to island, and men made way for him.

For a walking stick, he carried a spear. Behind him went two of his caravan men, each with sword slung from the shoulder. This was merely a matter of decency, for while a saint got honor from going empty handed and alone, it was expected of Carver's kind to be ostentatious.

The island was half a mile long. It was hardly improper to walk, though for a formal call, he would have had to ride Malikat, and she was conspicuous. Measure in everything, Carver reasoned; this way, there's a chance of seeing Flint before he sees me.

His glib logic was just sufficiently flawed to make it amusing. Flint, moreover, didn't realize that Maryam had during all these years improved her talent for piecing together trifles, so that any surprise by a police agent coming from Cairo to Suakin would be pure coincidence.

Satan fly away with Flint! See the *vakeel,* then the chief of police . . . for good measure, sell to the slave dealer whom the governor especially liked. You make less on each deal, but you stay in business longer, and get protection when you need it. He looked up at the mighty bulk of the white warehouse. It belonged to a government clerk whose salary was less than eight United States dollars a month, and the building had cost $80,000. Oh, a man could look forward in Suakin, why ever look backward and die?

Men with wicker cages of chickens balanced on their heads stalked through the streets. Dogs snarled and yapped. A donkey boy whacked the rump of his animal; and this took skill, for the towering load of brushwood left little above the legs exposed. Egyptian soldiers lolled in Greek cafes; the flies were as thick as the coffee. And through all the confusion of the narrow street a man dashed nimbly, zigzagging, and he shouted, *'Haraj! Haraj!"* and displayed the battered copper pot he offered for sale.

A Greek shopkeeper shouted a bid. The auctioneer bounded on. *"Haraj! Haraj!"* More bids. He'd remember the highest, and come back.

You could find almost anything but room to breath in Suakin. From screened *mashrabiyeh* windows, jutting out like balconies from second and third floors, women looked down, and screeched shrill gossip at those peering through lattices on the other side, only a few yards away.

Look back . . . that's funny . . . look ahead or you'll be run down . . . it began to amuse Carver. And then he saw what no one had predicted.

TWO runners in livery cracked whips and shouted to clear the way for the victoria which had no more than two feet clearance on either side. The lady, alone except for her black maid, could not be going more than half a mile, but *izzat* compelled her to drive in state.

It was strange, seeing a woman wearing a little straw hat, a shirtwaist, a prim, high collar; it was stranger yet to see a woman, who, neither black nor brown, was unveiled. A coral silk parasol filtered the sun, and gave a pleasantly artificial glow to her fine face; and it brought added fire from that tawny red hair.

The victoria little more than crept. A baggage camel was stubborn about being maneuvered into an arched gateway, and the drivers were cursing Allah, the infidel woman, her religion, and their own religion.

Without that red parasol's exagger-

ation, her smooth cheeks and lovely throat would be the cream tint of magnolia blossoms, the magnolias that blossomed along Shubra Drive, that winter in Cairo. Though they still blossomed, it would not be as in 1884; Carver now knew that, and he knew that her eyes, instead of being blue or gray or green, were midway between brown and hazel. He knew that she could smile, and perhaps would, if she were not on the street.

This was Irene Marland, who had almost married him. Seeing her made it all the better that Harrod Flint had come to Suakin.

It took all Carver's will, but he looked her in the eye. For an instant he held her glance, and then her chin rose, and he could see the crinkle of her nostrils, as though he had added somewhat to the smells of Suakin.

Of course she'd not know him. She was not burned by desert winds, not starved and sweated gaunt. What had there been to change her, except only time, and even now she was still short of thirty-two: six months, three weeks short, and the quick reckoning, before he realized what he had counted, shocked Carver.

Her mouth was tight, and not merely from being on her dignity in public. He saw more than he could understand, yet he read enough to know that she hated someone, or something.

The victoria rolled on, and rounded the corner. For a moment, a trace of sweetness fought the reek from fishing boats. Then that too was gone.

Carver had never resented Irene for her intolerance; now he wasn't even bitter about it all. This was indeed the closing of a circle! And surely the march behind him had been his final desert crossing. He smiled as a child delighted by a surprise which he doesn't yet fully understand.

Carver found the *vakeel,* who was fat and who made his sweat stained uniform bulge, pulling away from its buttons. His neck overflowed the collar of the absurd tunic. He was drenched with enough attar of roses to stifle a Cairene whore, and in a way, he resembled one. But he was happy to see the Father of the Kurbaj, and he rang for coffee, and he offered long cigarettes which were tainted with hair tonic.

He made as many compliments with his diamond clustered fat hands as he did in his purring, Turkified Arabic; he and his kind were another of the reasons for Egypt's disorder, and Simon Carver's slave trade. The *vakeel* inquired about Carver's health for the third time, and Carver raised the ante; and all the while the *vakeel's* eyes caressed the towering Hadendowa guards. The cape of one of them bulged a little. An expert can come amazingly close to calculating the value of a bulge, in gold napoleons, in pounds sterling, or in piastres.

WHEN Carver was finally granted permission to leave, the figure of Hadendowa had smoothed perceptibly. The *vakeel,* ceremoniously returning Carver's bow, became fairly cross-eyed from trying at the same time to cast loving glances at the bag which nestled at the foot of an atrocious ormulu cabinet.

"Ahmad al Faris," he repeated, "*wallah,* he is a good man, an honest man, his father was my father's friend, the odors of paradise follow him. And the peace upon you, and the blessing, and long life!"

Carver redoubled it, and retreated. And liked the stench of the street. The *vakeel* had a cut coming from Ahmad al Faris, who would undervalue the lot of slaves.

Then Carver went to see the chief

of police. That visit ended, the other Hadendowa assayed somewhat less gold per ton.

But no sign of Harrod Flint. He might be in the *souk*. He might be picking flies from his brandy in any one of twenty Greek cafes. He might be asleep in a stable, or calling on the British garrison commander; or, chatting with the *vakeel*.

Oh, to hell with Harrod Flint!

Carver looked at the Hellenic and the English lettering of a sign: HERAKLEON ARISTOPOPOULOS, GENTLEMAN'S TAILOR. CIVILIAN AND UNIFORM CLOTHES. SUITINGS & HABERDASHERY.

The place was really top drawer, for Suakin. One window was glazed. Fly specks frosted the glass.

After thirteen years in the Soudan, a man learns to recognize a fool when he sees one, even when what he sees is himself dimly reflected in dirty glass. But the idea grew. It'd be funny, just as a side line, to see if Harrod Flint would recognize him, as it were, in mufti.

But no use begging the question. That wasn't why he wanted white man's clothes. He did not really want them. It was rather a compulsion; he had to have them, to do that which had to be done, something which made Suakin and Harrod Flint not too important.

A damn fool is no less one for admitting that he is such; but Carver felt better for being honest with himself, so he went in, and told the terrified Mr. Aristopopoulos to quit choking and shaking, for this was *bona fide* cash transaction.

CHAPTER IV

IT TOOK Carver only a few days to prepare his indirect approach to Irene, whose position and whose staff of servants made her three story palace as public as a bird cage. Her husband, Colonel Barlow Dayton, who commanded the garrison, ranked a house overlooking the Channel, though sea breezes were too scarce to make this an advantage.

Two things favored Carver: the British officers commanding Egyptian troops loathed civilian officials and department heads; and this was mutual. Also, Harrod Flint would hardly state that he was looking for Simon Carver; though his orders, whether warrants or otherwise, would be made out in that name, his quest would be directed toward Abu 'l-Kurbaj, the Father of the Scourge. There probably wasn't a man in the entire Soudan who had ever heard the name of Simon Carver; a man was called according to his work.

So, the risk was by no means insane; yet the back of Carver's neck twitched a bit as he handed his hat and stick to one servant, and a card to another.

The words pencilled on the card won him an audience. The colonel, a bulky, square jawed man, got up from his carved teak chair, and went more than half way across the enormous room to greet Carver. Dayton's pale blue eyes were bright, his sun bleached brows bristled from the intentness, the eagerness, the incredulity which made his nostrils twitch. A stolid, steadfast man, this Colonel Dayton; not too brilliant, not too shrewd, but purposeful, and hard to shake from an opinion, or from his reserve. Hard to get moving, and hard to stop, once in motion. Mountains might do it, and so might sudden death. Carver could think of nothing else, unless, and he noted the mixture of doubt and desire in that rough hewn massive face it were those few words.

A hard, heavy hand, strong and hairy; it had a grasp which made Carver think of the man's jaws and strong, tobacco yellowed teeth. The drooping

straw colored moustaches accented the stubbornness of his mouth.

All this during greetings; and then, even before he gestured to a chair, Dayton said, "Incredible, Mr. Carver! But sit down."

Carver sat. "It's probably rot from the start," he said, glumly. "I overheard some pilgrims boarding the *Tor*. Dirty tub, but one takes what one can."

"Osman Digna simply can't be in el-Kaff, or even in the brush. Cowardly old devil, but certainly not mad!"

Carver got up. "I meant well, sir. May I have my hat and stick?"

"Here, here, just a moment, don't get huffy! Who the devil are you? Er, I mean, what—ah, your face isn't familiar."

Carver grinned and winked. "Do you often notice civilians?"

"Sit down!" The colonel said it as though giving a command at parade. "Who—what are you?"

CARVER studiedly rubbed his hands palm to palm, and took his time eyeing the colonel. The man was avaricious; not for gold, but for glory, and he was one of those who reach middle age and still think that merit is in itself enough to get kudos. He was stupid in an intelligent way. Colonel Dayton's expression explained the tautness of Irene's lovely face. Once she had had imagination, but it must have been suppressed as something indecently American . . .

All this, while Carver baited his man with silence. At last he answered, "With all respect sir, that is none of your God damned business. For personal reasons, I preferred to see you, rather than confer with . . . um . . . civilians."

Dayton choked and got red. Then he swallowed and smiled. "Oh, of course, of course. I mean, what's your interest—one can hardly dash out into the brush on a wild goose chase."

"That is your risk, sir," Carver countered, with grave courtesy and regret.

A servant came in.

"Ruh! Imshi! Get out!" Dayton roared.

"But, *ya Pasha,* I beg to say—"

So Dayton listened. The servant admitted an orderly who presented papers.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," Carver cut in, tactfully, "and I sail tomorrow. Though perhaps I could—"

"Damn it all, sit down and wait for me! I'll be back directly! Habeeb! God blast your hide, Habeeb! Whiskey soda for—"

He hated to say "this gentleman," so he merely pointed as he headed for the door.

Carver settled down to enjoy the whiskey. Presently, he clapped his hands. A lurking servant recognized the sound and beat as those of a man used to command. His approach was ceremonious.

"Tell madame," Carver ordered, "that I beg the honor of paying respects for the sake of her father, Doctor Marland."

It was just that easy. And soon she was in the room.

Only in her eyes did Irene Dayton show surprise, though it seemed that her stride faltered, for an instant, and that she flinched as though cut by a whip. But when Carver bowed, she formally asked him to be seated.

"They don't understand English," she volunteered, after a moment of confusion. "I know truly that they don't. I won't have any other kind."

It was strange, sitting there and listening to himself talking to a woman he had not seen in thirteen years; there were moments when he could not be certain whether this was now, or then;

whether this was her husband's house, or that of her father, Doctor Marland.

Thus for one half of Carver, the numbed, the dazed, the paralyzed part; the rest of his duplex brain tracked swiftly, cunningly, surely. He looked at his watch, at the door, and then at Irene, with an eye flicker challenging as a lancer levelling his weapon.

"Don't tell me a thing, you're unhappy, skip it! Just find a way of seeing me—" He gave her a pencilled card. "Without your carriage, and with a veil."

"Unhappy—" She groped; this wasn't the Southern gentleman who had once bowed over her hand in a courtyard all red with poinsettias, and sweet with honeysuckle and orange, and ablaze with bougainvillea. Then, indignantly, "Just *why* would I be unhappy? You're going rather far, Simon."

He cocked an ironic eye. "Women are always unhappy with whatever they have and wherever they are."

She licked her lips, coaxed into place a stray from that splendid crown of copper red hair, and then found she could not sustain the look he levelled, eye to eye.

SO SHE laughed, shook her head, that fine, well poised head, as if to clear it, and he feared for an instant that she might have succeeded. The fan flick, the painted silken fan betrayed her, and reassured him. She'd forgotten to be studiedly graceful.

"How's your father? I was sorry—very sorry—I didn't see him before I left."

"Then you've not heard? He passed away nine years ago."

He got up to offer his condolences. Irene, all self-possessed again, thanked him, and got up to leave. What happened hereafter was in the hands of Allah. But something would happen—

Carver was not amazed at Dayton's early return, and at his obvious annoyance. The colonel did not explain, though if he had, and had varied one syllable from the precise truth, Carver could have corrected him, for he had planted the false message.

Dayton, resuming the subject, was so eager that he had to be skeptical. "But damn it, our spies tell us Osman Digna's at Adarama!"

Carver yawned. "Not to be unpleasant, sir, but I remember the mess at Khor Wintri and Teroi Wells. Colonel Holled Smith's troops, well, those that quite survived, outraced Darvish horse and Darvish foot. The spies, I mean, hadn't been reliable. I'm not reliable either." A bitter short laugh. "I kept up with the troops. What shall it avail a man if he saves his hide and loses his command?"

He turned abruptly.

Colonel Dayton didn't stop him. He made a wry face, and cursed in a rumble which he considered a proper undertone. Cashiered for cowardice, another soldier of fortune disgracing the uniform! Insolent beggar, trying to use us to settle his grudge against Osman Digna!

Carver, however, counted on the force of his suggestion to plant an idea. So, taking his hat and stick, he went out, quite pleased with everything, including even the uncertainty. He would tell Irene who and what he was; tell her that he could buy half a dozen colonels; that he was going to retire, and live on the Riviera. She was homesick, so he'd stay, to hell with that amnesty for Confederates, sure I can go home, but why be a fool and try to muddle around in what remained of the old south, nothing but the memories of old men who bored everyone with their repetitions of what they did at

Chancellorsville and what Lee said after Appomatox!

She wanted to go home, and couldn't. He could, and didn't want to.

As he passed the shuttered windows of the house he had subleased from a Greek merchant, he made a bet with himself. She'd be there. Curiosity would drive her.

Funny if Osman Digna did come back for a snoop around Sinkat or Tambuk or Tokar! The old devil never did stay put . . . Rumors of Osman Digna were as good as the man himself, though neither was ever chased more than twenty miles inland.

CHAPTER V

INSTINCT rather than any sign told Carver that he was under observation whenever he came into Suakin. He knew that Harrod Flint was there, and that Maryam's warning had been good.

Carver had discarded his uncomfortable European clothes, since he would not again have to call on Colonel Dayton. Curiosity would, or it would not draw Irene; and curiosity needed time to fatten. So, while closing his affairs in Suakin, he always circled back to the house which awaited Irene's arrival. Native servants, those lovers of intrigue, would not betray her unless someone bribed them; so she could slip out at night, with that brawny black wench to go with her, and perhaps a footman to follow, for good measure.

The abrupt ending of that first meeting was his best omen. Suakin would try anyone's patience with its monotony, heat, smells, its cramped confines, its bare handful of "white" inhabitants, most of whom were not the sort of people a colonel could receive socially. All this would feed her discontent and make her think of gay and spacious Cairo. She was doubly homesick; without having seen her face, he could have taken that for granted. So he waited patiently for her, as he had for his vengeance.

Meanwhile, in each *souk,* the stall keepers and vendors whispered furtively of Osman Digna . . . *Wallah,* could he dare bribe the guards and come all alone into el-Kaff . . . *aywah,* he had gold buried there . . . no, by God, he was lurking in the hills . . .

This amused Carver. It was like watching one seed sprout, and seeing its growth scatter seeds of its own. Colonel Dayton by now didn't know he had a wife, for glory beckoned. His spies must be dripping with rumors . . .

Probably Harrod Flint was drawing strange conclusions.

Retire, hell. Go down to Obok on the French Somali Coast. There'd always be slaves coming out of Ethiopia. He could not quit. Having seen Sherman's march through Georgia, he ran slaves by way of defiance.

He was now near the green door, and not anxious. If not now, then later. If not at all, then the power is with Allah.

Carver stepped into the deep archway, and heard his feet echo in the dark tunnel which opened into a court. Looking up, he saw a dim light in a second floor window. That, however, had been set as a marker. She might not yet have arrived.

Still, she might be waiting.

Carver paused to relish the suspense. He backed toward the far corner of the court to look for shadows on the blind. His move took him out of moonlight and into a dark angle which faced the deeper blackness of the stairway leading to the upper floor.

Motion on his own level, somewhat heard and somewhat sensed, told him that more than Irene awaited. A bulls-

eye lantern's shutter clicked. He had not rightly nor soon enough interpreted its odor. He was momentarily dazzled.

"Don't move," a businesslike person said in English. Then, though the light did not shift, a man emerged from near it, and came into the opening. "My men have orders to fire. Ah . . . whip and all! Abu 'l-Kurbaj. Simon Carver, in other words."

"What is all this?"

"Arrest in the name of His Highness the Khedive."

"I'd like to hear the charges? You don't mind, do you?"

THOUGH Carver's voice was not entirely steady, he was nevertheless sufficiently in command of himself to note, with pleasure, that the speaker had a struggle to suppress elation, for this was almost of a piece with nailing Osman Digna!

"Trading with the enemy."

No trivialities such as slave running. This was a matter which a firing squad would settle.

"Interesting," Carver admitted. "But I am not convinced of your authority. Never mind reading the warrant, the sound of it doesn't make it genuine. May I see it?"

"I am required to read it, but not to hand it to you. You'll have ample opportunity later."

"I suppose I shall."

A pause. "I don't like this, Carver. I'm Flint."

Carver started, visibly. "Harrod Flint! God damn it, they would send you."

"I didn't like it. After all—"

A wry chuckle. "I taught you this game. That's life, I suppose. *Maktoub!* How many men did you bring?"

"Three."

"Thanks, though I'd really felt flattered if you'd had the place surrounded."

"I say, don't lay it on—now, may I—"

"Just a moment!" Carver snapped. "You've no Egyptian police officer here, have you?"

"I should say not!" And Flint laughed.

"Then where's your search warrant? You're trespassing, and—" He looked up, sharply jerking his head. "Saoud!"

At his call, a grayish cloud poured down from the courtyard wall; a man, popping up as though on a ladder behind it, had dumped a basket of ashes over those who crouched with guns in the supposedly protected angle of the stairs.

Carver flung himself aside. A shot whacked out of the billowing ash. The lantern dropped. The men in ambush were blinded, and coughing beyond control. Tall, wedge-shaped men came swiftly to seize Flint from behind.

Others darted in to club Flint's demoralized aides.

"Do what is to be done!" Carver said, harshly. "Bar the door!"

In the moonlight, it was clear that Flint was a brave man, but not a happy one. He wasted no effort struggling. He did not try for feigned unconcern, nor stagey smiles, nor blustering threat. He said, far more steadily than during his moment of supposed triumph, "Just a moment, Carver!"

"Well?"

"You can't do this."

Carver brushed ash dust from his cape. "I have already done it." He made an impatient gesture with the grip of the *kurbaj* slung from his wrist. "We are no longer concerned with the laws of Egypt."

"You'd still do better to surrender," the agent said, firmly and confidently. "Even if you got off the island, and to Omdurman—"

"You'd hunt me to the ends of the earth, or someone else would!"

"Precisely," the agent said, unblinkingly solemn.

"Do what is to be done!" Carver repeated, and went up the stairs to meet his fate.

HE WAS not concerned about that one shot. Confined in the well of the courtyard, it would not be noticed on the outside, and if noticed, it would be ignored; it could not be traced.

Carver was sorry about what he had to do with Flint, but one must endure many strange flavors before one tastes vengeance. Though he needed only a few more days in Suakin, these must be free of all menace.

From the gallery which overhung the court, he looked down into the main street, and over the roofs of el-Kaff. He could see his own house, and that of Osman Digna, and the mosque as well. Beyond the gun bristling wall was the weirdly silvered stretch of plain reaching to hills that blocked the horizon.

Troops were moving, cavalry and infantry, to march a few miles and to camp beyond the girdle of *dhurra* patches, so that at dawn, they could take the field. He could not distinguish guidons or standards, but judging from the length of the dark column, and the camel transport, Colonel Dayton must be in command. Another attempt to snare Osman Digna!

And this gave added meaning to the word of a servant who came to whisper, "Master, she is here, yea, the one you commanded."

Dayton would not be back for some days. Irene would not be missed for some days. . . The sequence and timing were more than he had anticipated, so he paused for a moment, trying to think.

CHAPTER VI

THE room was clean, but bare of all but an *angareb*, two chairs, a table, and the new whitewash of the walls. An hour or more had passed since Irene had been convinced that the affray in the courtyard was something less than, as Carver ironically put it, "snow on the desert's dusty face," and that his men were taking care of snoopers, and that she need not fear any embarrassment.

And that hour had bridged a thirteen year gap. When that lovely, frozen mask finally cracked, Carver thought of how a dry *khor* in a twinkle becomes a torrent which overwhelms men and pack animals before they can scramble to safety.

"It's been driving me mad! Year after year of it! One corner of desolation after another! I want to go home, I want to get out of all this, I was a fool, you and I could have gone home, I didn't have to stay till Dad passed on—" She dabbled her eyes with a wadded, soggy handkerchief. "He was generous, he wasn't wooden and stodgy and—"

Carver's eyes became sharp and malicious, "He could have forgiven me what you called my Negro wench."

Irene made a gesture as though to tear to shreds a phantom tapestry which glowed evilly before her eyes. "Oh, I know, I learned later, I didn't believe you, I didn't believe anyone who said—who told me—that—"

"That Maryam was merely an accessory to my serving Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, and His Highness, the Khedive?"

She looked up through fresh tears, and steadfastly regarded him. His appraisal, meanwhile, was critical. "With your skin, your color, and the veil and *habara* you're gotten up in, you'd pass

for a lady from Cherkess, easily."

Irene's face showed that she caught the significance of the suggestion, but she ignored it, and went on, "That Maryam, a matter of duty, just as a soldier has to kill."

"There was always s o m e t h i n g strange about that clique of straight laced Puritans who demanded an investigation of the home life of undercover agents!" he said. "But I've never been sure. Each guess contradicts the other. Harrod Flint seems to have feathered his own nest, but there were easier ways for him."

"And I'd not met my—" She didn't want to say husband, in view of what they planned. "Colonel Dayton, so it wasn't he."

"There were other agents," Carver went on. "But by coincidence, I was exposed, for conduct prejudicial to the good order of the service, can you beat that? Thrown to the dogs—though the book specifically forbade such 'goings on,' one got verbal orders—"

She nodded. "I wish I'd known—Good heavens, I was only doing what I thought to be right at the time . . ."

"Then you did and probably still do believe that I'm only a slave runner, dealing in worthless blacks!"

Her chin shot up aloofly. "That's not true, Simon. . . . As a matter of fact, while you seem to think I've held a scorn for your profession, I've never really thought the slaves were anything worth worrying about."

"And that's just the trouble with Western civilization!" Carver shot back. "The white man has always held himself far above anyone else just because of his color. Take your own father for instance—"

"My father never dealt severely with any of his—"

Carver stilled her with a raised hand. His anger showed plainly in the tilt of his head, and outthrust arm. "My blacks go to Arabia, they don't sweat on plantations like your father's negroes did! They're practically members of the family, poor relatives doing household chores. A good many earn bits of money, here and there, to buy their freedom. And a pious owner often liberates a slave to win merit with Allah."

"We had free blacks, a few, back home!"

Carver snorted. "Did a freed Negro ever become mayor, or governor, or president? The like of it's happened here. And a freed slave mixes with free born, no matter how high ranking, and he's welcomed for whatever he's worth as a man. Now what are you whining about?"

"The dreadful cruelty of the caravans, the desert crossings."

CARVER grimaced, conceding the point. "The Arab traders are tough, they're not like the final buyers. But my Negroes eat and drink as well as I do on the march. And many's the time I've got off my horse and walked to give the poor devils heart and example to carry on. Look at my household in Suakin—they've all been freed, and try to drive them away, they wouldn't go back to their homes in Kordofan if you paid them! They're like the thousands of others who lead better lives because I cracked the whip for some days, to march them into so-called slavery. Christ, woman! You're a slave yourself—to idiotic notions, and to a man who isn't your style."

"Don't rub that in! Well, I don't believe Osman Digna is within two hundred miles of Suakin. You started those rumors to win us a chance to be well on our way before the Colonel comes back. You may as well admit it, because it's the truth.—Well, it is, isn't it?"

Carver nodded and grinned. Irene got up. "We have to leave before they miss Harrod Flint. I'll pack—and that *dhow* you told me about, her skipper will make sail right away, for you. But we have to hurry, I can see the false dawn already, they'll be missing Harrod Flint—"

He twisted free, and caught her arm. "They'll not miss him. I'll show you why we needn't run, breakneck. *Dhow* or no *dhow,* I'm not running out with a carpetbag, the way Dad and I left Georgia."

"Simon, good God! What do you mean, *they won't miss him?"*

He hustled her to the hall, and toward the gallery overhanging the courtyard. "Simon," she protested, choking, "I won't, I can't go with you—if you do anything like that—I won't be an accessory to—to—murder."

"Don't want to be accessory to a killing? How many Negroes do you suppose there had to be at the start, to land the hundred your Daddy got back home, all in good order? Time for you to learn the facts of life. I've done a cleaner job of slave running than was ever thought of where they supplied us in the States!"

She looked down into the grayness of the court. False dawn made it easy for her to see the four who were stripped to the waist and secured to the wall. Carver, holding her to the rail, spoke to Saoud and the Hadendowa retainers.

The wedge shaped men had hippopotamus hide whips. Each flexed his back, drew the supple lash expertly through the closed left hand, hefting, testing the balance.

"Beautifully muscled," Carver murmured. "But, lucky for them, I'm not at work, down there."

The multiple hissing ended in a smack and a thud. Even in the murky grayness, the track of the lash was clean and clear. Smoothly as dancers, the Hadendowa plied the *kurbaj;* the first stroke seeming to continue, backhanded, into a second . . . a third . . . a fourth. . .

THE trickle of blood down the taut bare backs and ribs showed how deceptive was the easy grace of the Hadendowas. Irene ceased to fight Carver's grip. She was trembling, tense, twitching in sympathy, yet craning her neck in spite of herself.

H i s s s s s—whack! Antiphonal, it seemed, as though the four whips questioned and answered each other.

"Don't be a God damned hypocrite," Carver said to Irene when she cried out from horror, "each nice old black mammy was the *other one,* the one who lived through what they all got on their day's march . . . you can't preach to me . . . stay here, or go where I go, live as I live, and you'll like my ways, finally . . ."

The four were taking it manfully.

"I could lay it on better," Carver told her. "I've been at it longer . . . I might have learned anyway, but what you thought and said, that night in Cairo helped me learn sooner. Is this any rougher than soldiering?"

She was held now by a sickening fascination. She wondered how long the four could endure the criss-cross pattern of lashes laid skillfully as a weaver throwing in shuttles of red to vary a ground of white. It was strange how gasp and whip thud blended with hiss and crackle . . . it was a devil's orchestration and she now gripped the rail, and licked her taut lips . . .

"Now you know who you're going with," Carver said; and though she had not for minutes spoken or given any sign of hearing, he knew that she understood. "You didn't know what you were doing that night. This night,

you do."

The four were hanging now from the wrists, limp, sagging.

"Shabash!" Carver commanded. "Good."

He left Irene at the rail, knowing that she would stay. As he went down, the Hadendowas began sluicing the flogged men with buckets of salt water. That done, they released them, so that they could sink to their hands and knees.

The false dawn was fading, and blackness deeper than that of night gathered, for the moon had sometime ago set. By lantern light, Carver knelt and offered his prisoners cigarettes. "This was to save your lives, gentlemen," he said, matter of factly. "Sorry, Flint, but next time, be careful about *cherchez la femme*. If I'd stayed longer in Cairo, I could have taught you that that has its limits."

Later, as dawn broke, and the first cries of hucksters and of men going to market came up from the street, Irene crouched at a window with Carver. He was pointing, and he said, "You see now why I said I flogged them to save their lives?"

Already, a new sound came from the men and women who gathered in the street. A tremendous jeering and laughing and pointing; some flung mud, and dung, and offal. Others stood and gaped at the four who filed down the street and into the morning light. All were enjoying themselves.

Each was astride a donkey, and bound in place. Each faced the tail of his mount. Each, though stripped to the waist, wore woman's headgear, and woman's ornaments. And the red welts glared in the dawn.

"They'll live," Carver said, "but they're no longer secret, and they can't work in Suakin, they're laughed out of town. Look at the policemen howling, and the soldiers!" He drew her from the window. "Go home now, and be ready when I tell you. We'll be on the way before he's tired of hunting Osman Digna!"

CHAPTER VII

COLONEL DAYTON'S expedition, which had left Suakin shortly after Carver had reversed Harrod Flint's trap, was reaching the end of its first day's march in search of Osman Digna. It made a brave show, with a Soudanese Mixed Company and two field guns in front. There were three Egyptian companies on the right flank, and three on the left. The Camel Corps brought up the rear, to complete the square which enclosed the camel transport, and the Arabs who tended the animals.

Ahead stretched a waste of thorny scrub. To the west rose a chain of hills perhaps fifteen hundred feet high, black and rocky and sterile. Through gaps in this barrier came the ruddy light of the lowering sun. Colonel Dayton, red eyed from squinting through blare and dust, lowered his binoculars as he caught sight of Teroi Wells, a smudge of green to his right front.

The column halted. The infantry set to work cutting thorn brush to build a barrier about the camp. Captain Bayles trotted out to take charge of the troop of Egyptian cavalry assigned to occupy Khor Wintri, a deep and broad ravine which ran due east and west.

"Captain," Dayton directed, "you will reconnoitre at sunrise. When you make contact with Osman Digna, engage and hold him, while the main body takes him from the flanks."

The idea was sound. In another moment it would have been put into execution, had not the colonel, whose eye had roved even while he issued final

instructions, noted that horsemen were skylined along a rise to the right front.

"Darvishes, by God! Hold it, Captain!" Up went the binoculars. Dayton thrust the glasses to Bayles. "See for yourself!"

"Quite right, sir." Then, with broad facetiousness, "I fancy their reconnaissance has detected us."

But Colonel Dayton was in no mood for magnificent understatement.

"Carry on, I'll ride with you."

After a few words with his second in command, he overtook Captain Bayles' troop. Hunger for kudos drove him, where common sense would have kept him where he belonged, at the head of the main body.

Dayton was near the end of a thirty mile stretch which, beginning north of Suakin and ending at Khor Wintri, an hour's brisk trot ahead, had during the past ten years seen seven battles, each of them a Darvish triumph. Even Kitchener, then a colonel, had taken a trouncing at Handoub. And in most of these disasters Osman Digna had taken a hand.

THE entire day's march had mocked Colonel Dayton, who like every other newcomer in Suakin simply couldn't understand how a beggar like Osman Digna hadn't been rounded up. Thus the sight of Darvish horsemen momentarily silhouetted on the distant crest made the colonel's eyes gleam and his moustaches bristle. At times, he cast apprehensive glances at the sinking sun. They might escape under cover of darkness.

The plain, apparently a monotonous expanse, was actually seamed by dry water courses, not visible until one was within a few yards of them; and the flatness was laced by outcroppings of rock. The thorn brush was thicker than it looked. This last detail of a treacherous land fooled Dayton as it had all his predecessors. He was quite sure that one couldn't skulk in that spare cover.

Only, a Darvish could; and some hundred horsemen popped up without warning, from the right front and the left. That Captain Bayles, prodded by the colonel's eagerness, had ridden up too close to the scouts, made no great difference, for they were cut down from the rear. The brush swarmed with Darvish footmen.

These charged with their mounted comrades. Howling and whirling yard-long swords, levelling spears whose heads were broad as two hands, they made for the astonished soldiers.

The troop wheeled as a man. They were in flight before Captain Bayles could give a command, or Colonel Dayton's face changed from eager scrutiny of the distant ridge. He drew his sabre, and bawled, "Bayles, God damn it, Bayles! Stop those bloody cowards! Stop them, I say!"

Bayles was trying. So were the two lieutenants, one English, one Egyptian. The former did check a platoon which had not been prompt in its panic.

Now that the mistake had been made, Dayton emptied his pistol and gallantly plied his sabre, a one man counterattack. His example heartened a few. But dust was rising. Darvish muskets raked the huddle with one-ounce balls. Darvish swordsmen were slashing reins, ham-stringing horses, and spearing riders, who fell. Others they dragged from the saddle to stab them.

Darvish horsemen swooped to cut off the retreat, but were not entirely successful. Some twenty troopers ploughed through, to race crazily toward the main body. The sound of their coming spread panic in camp. The brush beyond the carefully built thorn barrier

was alive with enemies waiting their chance . . . .

"The colonel's down!" the fugitives howled. "Everyone's cut to pieces!"

This last was not quite true. Captain Bayles and forty men had fought their way to a crest, which they were holding. But Colonel Dayton was not with them.

CHAPTER VIII

SIMON CARVER, after telling Irene to be ready to travel when he gave her the word, began to realize that his own leaving would be neither quick nor simple as had been his previous departures: the first time, with carpet-baggers' bullets speeding him to Savannah, and the second time, disgrace hurrying him from Cairo.

These had been flights, whereas this, despite his audacity in parading Flint, was an exit.

He had time to buy bills of exchange on Arab bankers in Obok, and time to dig up chest after chest of Maria Theresa dollars buried in his house in the mainland. Finally he had time to charter a *dhow*, so that it'd carry nothing but ballast. No stink of baled hides, no stench of dried fish, nor the reek of native passengers jammed like cordwood, and greased with rancid butter. While there was no such thing as a *dhow* which could ever outsail its odor, Nureddin Ali's *Star of the Faith* was fast, new, and not yet saturated with filth and fish-oil. So he went to bargain, and to pay the skipper his earnest.

"I'll take Malika to Obok," he was thinking as he haggled with the master, "and I'll ride her to the boat."

Malika, hoofs p o l i s h e d, m a n e braided, nostrils flaring to drink the wind: a mount fit for the final appearance of the Father of the Scourge. A file of Hadendows spearmen, and a file of porters carrying chests of dollars. A carriage bringing a veiled woman whose hair no one would suspect of being red.

One woman.

Carver grimaced. He was taking his time because to leave in haste and stealth would go against the grain; nor could he at once screw up his courage to tell Maryam that she, too, had come to the completion of a circle, and that a thing done has an end.

At the beginning, she had expected eventual dismissal, but fourteen years had done their work to him as well as to her: and handing Maryam, Moslem fashion, a bill of divorce all written out, was a simplicity far more difficult than any complex thing he had done.

So, back in the house at el-Kaff, he dipped slowly into his platter of *pilau*, and from the wrought iron skewer he plucked morsels of charcoal grilled mutton as though they had b e e n threaded pearls. Eating was a simple thing, yet also difficult.

At last he clapped his hands. Maryam came out from beyond the Boukharan hangings, and sat down.

"I hunted him and I found him. Early this morning."

"I heard, and it was good."

"Now Kitchener goes to hunt the Khalifa, and Kitchener will find him."

"Victory comes from God."

Carver inclined his head. "And from many cannons and machine guns, from smokeless powder cartridges, from soldiers who know their business—not like these clowns at Suakin. So I have marched the last slave to the sea, the trade here has ended."

Her eyes told him no more than her smile when she answered, "If Kitchener were so sure of Victory, how well for the British!"

"He shouldn't be, or he'd lose," Carver admitted.

"Yea, it comes from Satan, being too sure of victory."

"No matter." He took the folded paper from his belt. "Instead of speaking to you three times before three witnesses, I give you this in writing, witnessed and sealed."

MARYAM took, but did not unfold the paper. Carver used the silence: "This house is yours, the servants stay with you, and two chests of dollars. What is done, it has an end."

He could see neither surprise nor dismay nor resentiment in her smooth face, not even feigned indifference, or a hardening of the eyes. Maryam asked, "Are you so sure that the Frangi woman will do you good?"

Carver drew a deep breath. He pointed at the platter of rice, and the bowl of eggplant sauce, "Eat!" he commanded.

She dipped in and ate, daintily as a cat, and with the same relish. She had cooked it, and it was good. When she had done, she raised her eyes and said, "Would I poison you? You found me poor, you leave me rich, and God does what He will do. But you have been with us so long that we are your people, and they are not your people any more, and when you learn this, come back to your house.

"Will anyone remember the Father of the Scourge, after they have taken the Khalifa's head, and hunted down his *emirs,* and driven Osman Digna to his last corner?"

Maryam took the bill of divorce, and the deed to the house. She got up, looked about her, then made a bow and a gesture, as a queen when she is gracious. "You are welcome in my house. And peaceful journeying."

She stepped back into the doorway, and drew the Boukharan hangings together in front of her. For a moment Carver heard the tinkle of her anklets, and then he was alone with her perfume, and what was left of the *pilau.* It had been easier than he'd expected. So easy that he felt undeserving. He got up, and called Marouf to dig up the silver, and muster the spearmen. . .

"If Irene backs down," he told himself, as he had done most of that day, "then she'll back down."

Although she'd have sailed on the first stinking *dhow,* at sunrise, twelve hours had gone, and no telling what shackles she'd stirred up out of her past as she packed up. Carver, however, had to leave, and soon. For the time, he was safe enough in the bought good will of police and local officials. The laughter of Suakin protected him, but in the end, flogging and parading Flint would stir up things too strong to beat with bribery.

He went back to the *quai,* where Nureddin Ali's men worked at fitting out the *Star of the Faith.* Though still young, her rigging and sails were tattered. No Arab shipmaster ever replaces when he can patch and scrimp. Bad enough, going down in a Red Sea squall without also losing a new suit of canvas!

Nureddin, indeed, felt that it insulted Allah to put so much trust in stays and shrouds and spars and sail; but since the Father of the Scourge was paying for the stuff—

Despite every assurance that Colonel Dayton could not possibly return in time to interfere, it was a long night for Carver. The expedition, undoubtedly in bivouac at Teroi Wells, would start scouting in earnest at dawn, making for the Erkowit Hills—another day gone, before the hoax was exposed. Yet Carver was so uneasy that he dared not go to the house where Irene was waiting with her maid, lest his tension prove infectuous.

"She might talk herself out of something," he said, reasoning from his own qualms on breaking from the house in el-Kaff.

So he sat on the poop of Nureddin's *dhow* until dawn, when the shipfitters returned. "Within the hour, sahib, within the hour, and it is on my head and eyes!" Nureddin swore. "Sooner than the tide and the wind!"

CARVER waited awhile, till he saw the master was right. She was all fit and provisioned. Impatient, he went to the rendezvous. Malika was in the courtyard, saddled and caparisoned, and switching flies from her sleek flanks. The carriage was waiting. His porters lounged by their bales and boxes. The Hadendowa spearmen squatted in the shade, gambling, chewing, and spitting.

Carver drew a deep breath, and swallowed his heart. He went deliberately up the stairs, yet he was out of breath when he came to the door.

The maid opened it before he could knock.

He looked at Irene for a moment. "Even with your veil down, you look like someone else."

"But I'm not. I sat up all night, looking out there—" She pointed toward the hills. "Thinking of how long I've been someone else, and how wonderful it'll be to be myself again."

"We're waiting for the tide." He couldn't think of anything else to say. "Nureddin'll hang a signal from the masthead." Catching Irene's arm, he went on, "Look from this window, you can see her."

"Which one, they all look alike."

He began to pace the floor. He quit when he saw how his men lounged in the courtyard. Irene's silence spoke for itself. The only sound in the room was the buzzing of flies . . .

But at last, the s t r e e t sounds changed. Carver got up, listened, frowned as the voices gained in pitch and volume. Gendarmes raced about in the street.

"Rioting." He went to the latticework window, yanked open a panel, craned his neck, cocked his head. "In el-Kaff."

He ran into the hall, to race up the stairs to the roof. Riders were straggling in from the south. There was no mistaking the glint of accoutrements. Those were men in uniform. Far off, dust rose, here and there. Horse and camel troops stampeded through the brush.

The British cruiser anchored north of Suakin Island was training her guns on el-Kaff. She dropped two shells. A landing party was coming ashore. The voice of revolt died abruptly.

When Carver came down from the roof, Irene's maid was running down the hall, crying, *"Sitti,* they've been cut to pieces! The colonel's dead!"

"Shut up, you fool!" Carver yelled, but the damage had been done.

Irene got up out of her chair. Her eyes were wide, her face was frozen, and her color had gone. Then she steadied herself. "That's enough, Salima. Don't believe everything you hear." She turned to Carver: "He must really have found Osman Digna."

They stood, looking each other eye to eye. This event was an accusation he could not answer. No use saying that Osman Digna could not possibly be more than a few miles from the Adarama and impending battle with Kitchener's advance guard. Neither could the Father of the Scourge ask her if she really believed that he would send twelve hundred men into ambush to get Colonel Dayton out of town for a few days.

But finally he said, "If I had ar-

ranged this, wouldn't I have allowed for the news coming back, and put you on a *dhow* that was ready to sail last night?"

SHE could not smile, but her face changed as if she had. "No, Simon, you'd not make me a widow. And it's just as if I'd left last night. Is the signal out? Oh, who cares, we'll go aboard, if the streets are clear, everything's quiet again."

She meant it. But before he could believe her, she had to say, "We've waited too long. Can't we go now?"

Carver went down to the court, and called to his men. As Irene's maid helped her to the carriage, he mounted up, to ride ahead through the courtyard gate. The street voices were a meaningless jumble in his ears. The gabble of fugitive soldiers, making themselves heros to the townsmen, was an old story. All that counted was the *Star of the Faith,* wallowing lazily off the *quai.* She was higher in the water now. The signal would soon go up.

The skipper was waiting for him. The crew was on deck, ready for command to hoist the yard. Carver dismounted, gave the reins to his *sais.* They'd have the devil's own time, getting Malika aboard. . .

Then the carriage pulled up. Irene jumped to the ground, and ran toward Carver. Her veil was thin, so thin that he could see her face, and what he saw sickened him. The words that followed could not make any difference.

"He's not dead. Captain Bayles got in. He finally cut his way out. He was on a hilltop. He saw the colonel go down with his horse, and get up. They didn't spear him. He's a prisoner."

"You talked to Captain — Captain—"

"A baggage camel blocked us. I heard while I waited. He and another officer. They didn't recognize me."

"Prisoner. Whoever took him, he'll send him to the Khalifa. The Khalifa has a lot of them. If they don't spear a man then and there, they're not so rough."

"That's not it, Simon. I can't go now. Not while he's a prisoner. I can't."

For some seconds, time and space went crazy. Then Carver heard himself say, "You can't. Not until I get him. Out of Omdurman. Out from under the Khalifa's nose."

He beckoned to the *sais.* No use waiting for her answer. But Irene said, "Then I'll go, and I'll count the minutes till then."

He watched her get into the carriage, and drive away. The *sais* was holding Malika for him to mount. The crew of the *dhow* had begun to chant. Carver swung to the saddle. Looking up, he saw the signal rise to the masthead. Someone, considering that an order was an order, had raised it to show that the tide was right, regardless of Carver's being within spitting distance.

Had the tide been twenty minutes earlier . . . fifteen . . . ten . . .

But there was no use cursing the tide. No man who had to make the desert crossing to Omdurman dared curse water, not even salt water.

CHAPTER IX

SINCE there was no hiding anything from Maryam, Carver went to the house which he had given her—the house in which she had told him he would always be welcome. He did not want to go; but staying away would have put him in the light of one who cannot face his own work. So he sat in that old familiar room, and gave orders to his Hadendowa spearmen, to his steward, and to his secretary. He

waited for each to carry out his orders, and presently, porters came, carrying cases of cartridges, cannisters of powder, boxes of percussion caps, and pigs of lead.

Meanwhile, Maryam and her women stayed in the rooms behind the Boukharan hangings. He heard their voices, the tinkle of their anklets, yet they were as remote as creatures in another world, the world he would have quit but for Osman Digna's evil trick of having for once been where rumor said he was. Far harder to bear than disappointment was Carver's feeling that something more than chance had blocked him; it was as though dark Egypt had laid a claim, and would not relinquish it except at fatal cost.

Going to Omdurman was now dangerous as it never before had been, for Kitchener's British and Egyptian troops were at Berber. From there they had made a raid to destroy Shendi, a hundred miles upstream. All too late, Emir Mahmud was marching toward the junction of the Nile and the Atbara to block the British-Egyptian army.

All this was bad, yet nothing compared to what awaited one who went to pry into secret Omdurman, and the Khalifa's prison. While the task was simply a matter of bribery, it was equally simple for a bribe taker to double his reward and insure his safety by betraying the plan. In Egypt, things were otherwise, for corruption was an established industry, and British supervision restrained the executioner's sword.

It was not until the caravan was ready to leave el-Kaff that Maryam came from behind the Boukharan curtains, and said, "Father of the Scourge, there are many red haired women in your world. You pay too much for this one. When she thought they'd speared her husband, she was willing enough to go with you, but when she hears he's a prisoner, she balks like an overloaded camel."

"I'm not interested in your notions."

"They'll be good to remember in Omdurman," Maryam went on. Have I ever told you anything that wasn't true?"

He shrugged. "Truth is with Allah."

"You call it loyalty, she won't desert a prisoner," Maryam's mouth twisted in derision. "She's only one of those who pay a lot of attention to what other people say. That counts more with her than you do. She's afraid to do what she wants. Is she a woman for you?"

"This isn't a question of one woman, or another woman," he answered, scarcely keeping the anger from his voice. "This is a matter of going back to my own people. The slave trade is ended. I sent that man out to find Osman Digna, it's my fault he was trapped.

"If you only believed what you say, I'd believe it then, too," she said, quietly, and drew a deep breath. "Go with God!"

MARYAM stepped back and pulled the hangings together in front of her, leaving Carver alone with his doubts. His knuckles whitened from gripping the *Kurbaj*. He wondered if she knew how narrowly she had escaped a flaying for telling him things he'd much rather not heard. But for the bill of divorce, he would, for the first time, have beaten her. Since she was no longer his woman, it made no difference what she said.

Nevertheless, Maryam's words haunted him as he cleared Sinkat. They dogged him from well to well; and he began to accept them when, leaving the caravan route to avoid the British outposts south of Berber, he made for

the wastes between there and the thorn fringed banks of the Atbara. "What is it to me if that fat-headed fool went off half-cocked on a glory-hunt, with troops that'd stampede at the sight of a couple hundred Darvishes? He'd do the same thing sooner or later without my egging him on."

Weariness and thirst made him accept Maryam's logic; and during those ferocious days when camels died of thirst, all that kept Carver going was that he carried munitions for the Khalifa, who still had a chance to block Kitchener's British and Egyptian army. One crisp defeat, one of those fanatic charges which in the past had stampeded Egyptian troops, and the Soudan would remain free.

The Soudan never had belonged to Egypt; the Pharaohs had conquered and bled the land, and so had all those who had come after them. And the British—

Carver tried to spit, but his lips were burned black and his throat was dry. The British were using anti-slavery to furnish a noble front for a conquest whose real reason was to give Egypt's rotten government fresh loot, so it could pay the interest on her debts. They cared no more about the slaves than had the damn-yankees; no more than had Irene been concerned about her husband as a man. Elopement was all right, as long as the colonel was either safe, or else a hero properly fallen in the line of duty. In either case appearances came first!

Each cartridge, then, was protest and rebellion; and this made Carver drive his men until they reached the Atbara, and its two mile fringe of sharp spined acacias and mimosa. There was a little water, in green, scummy pools. The men dug in the sandy bed, getting a cleaner drink, though it was brackish. That night, from a great distance, Carver heard the mutter of drums, Darvish troops were concentrating. He hoped the Khalifa had sent enough to make a job of it.

It was not until he was near the Nile that Carver saw his mission in a better light. The bond between him and Colonel Dayton was personal; attacking a people and a principle was not the same as using an individual for one's own gain. And having survived the desert, he began to see the flaws in Maryam's logic.

"When a man's dead, he's gone," Carver told himself, thinking back to Irene's reaction to the false report of her husband's death. "But when he's bottled up in Omdurman, he'd only be wishing he were dead, and she'd be thinking of that until we'd hate the sight of each other. This isn't for him, it's not for her, it's for a clean start."

LATER, as the caravan emerged from the thorny scrub which guarded the approach to the Nile, Carver looked beyond the *dom* palms along the bank, and over the dhurra fields, and at Omdurman's five-mile sprawl on the further side. A masonry wall, twelve feet high and eight feet thick, skirted the river, and inclosed perhaps a quarter of the city. This barrier reached well above the low, flat-roofed mud houses of the city, and the conical tops of straw thatched huts, thousands of which girdled the Darvish capital. Over all this towered the cream colored dome of the Mahdi's tomb; the Khalifa's house, of solid masonry; Ali Wad Helu's house, the square bulk of the arsenal, and Beyt al Aman, "The House of Benevolence," into which was crammed the plunder squeezed from the empire of the Soudan.

From a distance, Omdurman's majesty filled the eye, and quickened the pulse; but Carver and his men knew

from old times that all this was only a great splash of squalor and corruption, a tangle of narrow alleys, of miserable huts and hovels; a jealously guarded death trap which seemed splendid because of the great emptiness in whose middle it lurked.

He turned to Aswad, his oldest man. "You know the plan, but Allah does what he will do. We may be back tomorrow, or in a week. We may not come back at all. If I get out of town with Colonel Dayton, it'll be with no more than our hides. See that you and the camels aren't herded into the army."

Aswad's wrinkled face puckered in a sly grin. "They'll need an army to take us into camp."

He spoke to the rear guard. They vanished with him into the thorny scrub, to wait, to look, to listen, ready day or night to make tracks for the desert. Without looking back, Carver resumed the march downstream, until he came to the ferry, north of Tuti Island, where the Blue Nile joined the White Nile.

There were no longer any boats on the river. All had been seized by the Khalifa's order, and none could put out except by his permission.

While getting into Omdurman was not easy, leaving was far harder. Carver, however, had prepared for the spying and the guarding which made it almost impossible for any party of riders to quit the capital as a body. Once he liberated Colonel Dayton, it would be every man for himself; but each of his Hadendowas knew where jars of water lay buried along the back trail to Suakin.

From the ferry, the caravan filed past the slave market, and down the southernmost of the four avenues which, like the ribs of a fan, joined at the tombs of the martyrs. The camels, protesting from carrying their own burdens and also those of the animals left with Aswad, plodded along the main avenue, until they reached the Mahdi's tomb. Near it was the Khalifa's palace, a solid heap of masonry whose two-storied annex overlooked the roofs of the city.

Carver's party skirted the great mosque whose unroofed inclosure had room for twenty thousand devotees at prayer. Finally, looping riverward again, and toward the southern end of the city wall, they came to the warehouse, and the adjoining arsenal.

Carver, standing somewhat apart from the kneeling camels, had a good view of the Khalifa's prison, whose guarded gate opened from the southern face of the walled quarters. This grim heap held his interest until an Arab steward came with black porters to unload the chests and bales.

"Heavy loads," the Khalifa's man remarked. "It's a wonder you made it."

CARVER couldn't be sure, whether suspicion or curiosity sharpened the steward's eyes; but having expected such comment, he answered, "Some died, it was tough going. But how would *you* like to tell the Khalifa you'd left a third of the cargo lying alongside the trail? No more than I would—and, they made it. Victory comes from Allah!"

"He, the Everlasting!" With that pious response well delivered, the steward yelled at the black men, "Get busy, get busy!"

Guards opened the heavy gates. Carver, looking into the warehouse, saw that the crazy confusion had not changed. There were Krupp field guns, rapid firing Nordenfeldts, a number of Gatlings; seven-pounders, gathering dust, poked their brazen snouts from between bales of cloth, bags of powder,

heaped pots and kettles whose copper the arsenal required for cartridge cases. Looming above the confusion was the Paris built carriage which once had belonged to the governor of Khartoum. Cannon balls, shells, bullets for muzzle loaders had burst from their containers. Here and there, powder strewed the floor.

The confusion heartened Carver. It suggested how he could make himself useful to the Khalifa. Meanwhile, above the grunting and grumbling of camels, the chanting and chattering of porters, he fancied that he heard the sad clink-clank of chains in the solid prison at the end of the avenue. He wondered, as he watched the checking cargo, whether there had been any point to the steward's remark about the prodigious load each animal had carried. Certainly there was nothing seditious or subversive in overloading one's animals; but Omdurman was a city in which a man suspected his own shadow, and whether commonplace or extraordinary, nothing was exempt from snooping, and inquisitive wonderings.

CHAPTER X

THE Khalifa's major domo assigned Carver a house not far from the mosque, so that he and his camels would always be under the eye of the Baggara Arabs, the Khalifa's kinsmen who had come all the way from Darfur to help him rule the empire; though the reason which that official gave was, "By Allah, the master loves to honor you, he wants you near at hand."

Servants assigned to the guest house brought *dhurra,* and chickens, and goats. Others came from the nearby market with baskets of beans and leeks and melons.

Later, drums rolled, and the square echoed from the brawling blast of trumpets carved from elephant tusks. *Mulazemin,* the picked men who guarded the Khalifa, were mustering in companies of a hundred, each commanded by a captain whose guidon marked the assembly spot. And there were three great banners, the standards of the emirs who had charge of guard divisions. These flags were inscribed with texts from the Holy Koran, and with the name of the commander.

The Khalifa, Abdullahi of the Taiasha Clan of the Baggara Arabs, was riding to the great mosque to lead the faithful in prayer. Carver caught the glances of his men, and said, "Go and say one for me. And keep your ears open on the way back."

Until he'd been received by the Khalifa, he was still a traveller, and he could omit several of the five daily prayers prescribed for True Believers. So, when his men went out, he remained sitting in the low doorway, watching the devotees in their baggy trousers and knee length tunics. He wanted to read the faces, hear the voices of the rank and file.

Black giants towered over men the color of old leather; there were lean, sharp faced Arabs, stately and bearded, the brains of the empire. Every province had sent its contingent; and those in the capital were hostages for the good behavior of their kinsmen in the provinces. From looking and hearing, he knew that Omdurman was tense, on edge, waiting.

"But what for?" he asked himself.

There was one answer: Emir Mahmud had marched down the Atbara River to take Berber, where Kitchener was massing his force of British and Egyptian troops. Yet there could be plenty of other causes for brittle nerves, for the half-concealed uneasiness he had sensed in those who went to prayer.

THE mosque enclosure was nearly a quarter of a mile long, and three hundred and fifty yards wide. From it came a mighty rumble, deep and surging, somewhat like thunder, and a little like the surf; ten, perhaps twenty thousand Darvishes intoned the prayer which their leader recited. Then came a lower note, one scarcely audible, a shaking of the earth rather than a sound: the rustle of garments, the touching of foreheads to the floor. Once more, the deep throated responses . . .

Finally, a ferocious howling; as of old, the Khalifa was promising them loot and victory. Then the elephant tusk *ombayas* bawled and bellowed, and the war drum El Mansura made the air shudder. The Khalifa, Allah's representative on earth, was returning to his house.

Presently, Carver's men came back. They licked their lips when they caught the odor of porridge with diced meat which the cook was stirring in the thatched shelter behind the house. At his gesture, they sat down.

"The Khalifa read a letter from Emir Mahmud," one began. "He's at Nakheila, it's not far to Berber and the British. He's going to cut them to pieces."

Another picked up the account: "Osman Digna's going to join him."

Carver made a face. "Mahmud and Osman Digna'll be so busy hating each other, they won't have time to fight anyone else."

A third said, "A trader told me that Emir Mahmud's building a fortified camp at Nakheila, he's been at it for a week now."

Digging in and waiting for Kitchener didn't strike Carver as the best way to cut any army to ribbons, but this was no place for a lecture on tactics. "Any gossip about Colonel Dayton?"

The first speaker resumed his report: "I asked a couple people, they said Osman Digna hadn't sent any prisoners from the coast. Nobody's heard of the fight outside Suakin."

And that did make Carver forget his weariness and his hunger. If Dayton had died on the march, weeks and even months might pass before the fact could be established. That the captive was held at the camp at Nakheila was by no means impossible; with a battle pending, anything could happen to him. Sitting there, hearing newly gathered gossip, gave him the unpleasant sensation of one muddling about in the dark, stumbling toward a destination which might no longer exist.

"You can ask the Khalifa," one suggested, seeing Carver's lengthening face. "He'll be sending for you soon, there was a lot of talk about how many cartridges you brought back."

"Wondering how the camels stood it?"

"By Allah, they wondered."

Carver said, bitterly, "Shaytan take this stinking town! You bring a small load, and they think you've been peddling the stuff along the way. You bring a big one, and that makes 'em gabble!"

Then two broad beamed Soudani wenches carried platters of steaming stew and *dhurra* porridge into the front room. Master and men flipped back their sleeves, said, *"Bismillahi!"* and dipped in, wrist deep.

Questioning the Khalifa about the population of his prison was risky business—but after long marches and short rations, here was the bounty of Allah, and a full belly brings confidence and courage. So Carver ate. After all, his men weren't worried, though they had cause enough, facing the prospect of having to slip out of Omdurman one jump ahead of a general alarm. Regardless of what Carver did, the Khali-

fa would pardon Carver's men—and, he'd hand them darvish tunics, drafting them into a holy war.

THAT night Carver was invited to the palace. He sat in a room just off the black-paved entrance hall, and after telling of his march, he listened again to the Khalifa's flattering suggestion: "Be one of my emirs, Father of the Scourge."

"Let me serve you in some other way. Darvishes would lose heart, following a Moslem convert into action, they'd think you didn't care much for them, giving them a foreign leader."

Abdullahi shrugged, spent a moment fingering his skimpy fringe of gray beard; then he smiled that winning smile, and his brother, Yakub, amiably mirrored it. "My steward," the Khalifa went on, "tells me this is the biggest load you've ever brought to town."

"The battle of the prophecy" Carver answer, "is nearer every day. That would give strength even to a camel, and more so to my men. And power comes from Allah."

"Did you have any trouble with British patrols?"

"Once or twice, as we got to the Atbara."

"You cut them to pieces?"

"They didn't want to get close enough. Neither did we." Carver grimaced, wagged his head. "They'd not been sent out to do anything but look. So we fired a few rounds, and kicked up a lot of dust, and let them see what they could see."

"What do you think of the railroad the infidels build?"

"For all these years," Carver answered, "the desert kept them from supplying their armies, or sending an army large enough to do any good. The cataracts of the Nile kept them from using boats big enough. Now with rails, they can laugh at the river and at the desert. The power is with Allah, and then yourself."

The Khalifa studied this. The hand that toyed with the spear shaft trembled. His eyelids twitched, and so did small muscles of his cheeks. Fine red lines streaked the murky whites of his eyes. Abdullahi was tense and worried, and the four secretaries squatting at the foot of his couch were plainly on edge. The guards at the doorway fidgeted. Something simmered under the surface, and each spy who went prying about Omdurman had on his trail another set to check up on his fidelity.

"The enemy," Carver went on, "is at Berber. But today, as I rode into town, all the plain between here and Khor Shambat was shaking from cavalry drill and infantry maneuvers. These could be with Mahmud, going to meet the enemy at Berber."

A b d u l l a h i straightened up, and frowned. "You think he needs more men?"

"Ten thousand seem hardly enough. All the more so when there must have been three times that many on the drill-ground today."

"The battlefield of the M a h d i's prophecy is—" He gestured toward the ridges and the plain five miles north of the capital. "Near us, where they'll be cut to pieces in sight of all Omdurman."

"What is prophesied, it is prophesied. But the more they're whittled down, near Berber, the easier it'll be to finish them off this side of the Kerreri Hills. What I meant was, ten thousand seem too few for the first blow."

"Who said there were only ten thousand? Osman Digna's joined Emir Mahmud."

That was the opening for which Carver had been sparring, and at a risk which had made the secretaries gape;

criticizing the Khalifa's plans was hazardous. He said, "That makes it different entirely. Osman Digna's a good man, look at his clever trick right under the walls of Suakin."

"Suakin?" Abdullahi's voice sharpened. "How? What?"

THIS gave an unhappy twist to Carver's mission; he could scarcely doubt that the Khalifa had not yet heard of Colonel Dayton's capture. Neither could he doubt that Osman Digna was even now at Nakheila, no more than fifty miles from Berber and Kitchener's army. Carver felt that he had trapped himself by taking too much for granted; and his voice had a strange sound in his own ears when he said, with feigned amusement, "The military governor, Colonel Dayton, heard that Osman Digna was prowling in the desert, and he rode out to get him. He took horse, foot, and artillery. A lot of them came running back, but he didn't. This was while I was getting together the ammunition I brought in today. They said that the colonel had been captured, not speared. Though Allah is the knower."

"Allah, by Allah, and again, by Allah!" The Khalifa was on the point of getting to his feet; then he sank back, and thumped the floor with his spear shaft. "He captured the military governor?"

"I wasn't there. He, or a part of his men."

"Praise be to Allah, Lord of both Worlds!" Even as he spoke, he hitched about to face his secretaries. "I have orders to dictate. Father of the Scourge, you have my permission to go."

Brusquely dismissed, Carver bowed himself out, to join his Hadendowas who had been waiting for him at the entrance. These had overheard enough to make them ask, once they were back in the guest house, "Why can't we volunteer to join Osman Digna, or Emir Mahmud? If the prisoner's there it'll be a lot easier—"

Carver broke in with a growl and a cutting gesture. "Racing to Omdurman was bad enough. Another brilliant idea could be worse, Allah alone knows where the man is."

"Are you sure the Khalifa told the truth?"

"For the first and only time, yes. He was surprised, and he was in a sweat before I backed out of his sight."

"So he writes to have Osman Digna send the Colonel to Omdurman?"

Carver snorted. "He's probably writing to find out whether Osman Digna actually is at Nakheila and hasn't run out before the going got too tough."

The Hadendowas were quite calm about it all. One said, placidly, "By Allah, we can hunt Osman Digna."

Since they already knew, Carver did not bother to retort that every trail between the Nile and the Red Sea was dotted with the graves, or the unburied bones of men who had hunted that wily old man.

CHAPTER XI

HARROD FLINT, despite more than forty stripes, decided he would not be jeered out of Suakin; and since the Law had lost all its majesty under the slash of *kurbaj* he went native, having learned in the same school as Simon Carver. Still aching from the merciless flaying, Harrod Flint disguised himself as an *effendi*—that is, a Turk who could write his own name.

A grim and tight lipped Turk, for motion of any kind was agonizing; and the only pair of patent leather shoes he could find in Suakin pinched his feet. The change was more than a mat-

ter of putting on a tarboosh and a civilian suit. The one he wore was a peculiarly vicious blue-green. The lavender cravet sickened him, as it would any decent Britisher. The hair pomade, the perfume, the moustache wax, these stifled him.

As he looked at himself in the fly specked mirror of his room, he said, sourly, "Damn well rather take another flogging."

His stomach played tricks when he put on half a dozen gaudy rings. He didn't mind looking like an honest Turk; his revulsion came from having to act and smell like one of the horde who were looting and pillaging Egypt, not with fire and sword as their ancestors had, but by bribery, thievery, embezzlement, trickery, and double-dealing. In other words, he was one to nauseate any proper Turk.

"Spats and a stick, God damn it," he complained, and shuddered from considering the gloves he'd wear.

When he stepped to the street, he typified the living reason why Britain had taken a hand in the management of Egypt. His sandy complexion was no handicap, since Circassian and Albanian blood could account for his coloring; moreover, there had been a good many red haired and green eyed men among the conquering Osmanli horde that had ridden from Central Asia to found an empire on the Mediterranean.

Just another minor official, out to sniff for petty larceny. Some of the Levantine shop keepers regarded him enviously: a gentleman of the ruling race, as they saw things.

He went to Maryam's house, beyond the drawbridge; and she, being both Coptic Christian and a "widow", was properly enough unveiled when she received him.

"By God," Flint was thinking, as they regarded each other, eye to eye, *"not a trace of woman scorned."* Then compliments, while the two completed the mutual appraisal.

"Ahmad Effendi," she r e p e a t e d, glancing again at the card inscribed in gilt ink, with English script as elaborately flourished as the Arabic equivalent. "This is a pleasure, please be seated."

He glanced about, and with ill-concealed contempt. There were only upholstered benches, which for his kind was entirely too old fashioned. Maryam clapped her hands, spoke a word to her maid. The Somali woman came from the other room with a carved and gilded chair. Ahmad Effendi thanked her in the mincing, Turkified Arabic he had learned so well. But he was still at loss; he didn't know whether he had impressed her, or whether she was merely too courteous to laugh in his face. Something behind those cryptic eyes made him wonder if he could be vigilant enough to keep her from poisoning him with the second cup of tea . . .

THEN Maryam smiled, a warm frank smile. "You're wonderful Harrod Flint, but I'd've known you, even if I'd not seen you the day you came to Suakin." This in English; and with a wry grimace he answered in the same language, "Well, well, no harm trying."

"You shouldn't be around, not for a week or two, after that frightful flogging," she remarked, without malice. "But—" Bracelets tinkled at her gesture. "Since you are here?"

"He's interested in an American lady I'm sure you know."

"Of course I know. You were once interested in her, in Cairo, yourself, but it wasn't mutual."

"Here, here—"

Remorselessly, she continued, "So you asked him for advice on how to hide me, and make sure the inspector'd find me. Oh, you're a smart man, Mr. Flint, but I'll fight my own battles, and really, there's nothing to fight about. Are my eyes red?"

"Er—not at all—really magnificent—but you're quite wrong—dash it all—" He was embarrassed, and not acting when he groped for a fresh start: "Please believe me, I didn't betray him to those stuffy old fools—I really liked the man, admired him immensely, grateful to him ever so much. For an American, he was quite a gentleman." Flint drew a deep breath, slowly shook his head. "Sad business."

"But you're looking for him?"

"Duty, you know. I didn't ask for it. Tried to avoid it."

"I don't blame you a bit," she said, with double meaning.

Flint reddened under his tan, "Oh, very well, it wasn't a healthy assignment, but what wasn't why—what I mean is, it went against the grain, finding him, strutting about, openly, the lord of all creation. I simply had to act."

"Now he's not in the open," she said, smoothly, "and you're still acting? Because of a sore back?"

He straightened sharply, w i n c e d from sudden pain, then caught and held her eyes. "If he believes I sold him out, back in Cairo, I can't hold that flogging against him. Truth is, I was quite prepared to have my throat sliced. I'd be happy—most happy—to have never started this mess. But I can't very well quit, can I?"

"You know, Harrod Flint," she said, after a long pause during which her shadowy smile had been turned into herself, rather than at her visitor, "I think I can believe you. I think you mean what you say when you tell me you didn't rip him up in Cairo. But he'll never believe it. Well—suppose I do believe, am I to tell you where he is?"

"Yes. For his own good. The Soudan's in an uproar. In a few months that blasted Khalifa'll be vulture bait, and *darvish* will be an unpleasant memory. There'll be no evidence, no witnesses—I mean, not enough for a capital conviction in a British court. So he'd get off light. Pay his debt, and get a fresh start. Oh, he'd be fined, doubtless, but not the tenth part of what he's accumulated, here and there."

"I wish he were here to listen."

IT TOOK him a second or two to catch the mockery, but he held his temper. "Slave trade's over. To be sure, it'll continue, but cruisers will be stopping boats bound for Arabia, free the Niggers, machine gun the skipper and crew. He's best out of it, please believe me."

"So, I'm to be disturbed about his red headed American lady, and tell you everything? *She* flared up, on account of me, that night in Cairo, and that's why he and I are here. What has it gained her? She's been sorry, all these years. Mr. Flint, I'll handle him in my own way. Unless I forget him entirely."

She made a two arm gesture which spread from her own lovely self until it included the entire house. "This isn't as crude as you pretended, Ahmad Effendi. I've had a good life, and a good life is ahead of me. I can't think of any girl I knew, back home, who'd not wish she were I. Don't be silly, you can't tease me into talking."

Flint fingered the brim of his hat until it was curled. He knew when he was beaten; temporarily beaten, that is, for the man was incapable of admitting that anything short of sudden death

could permanently defeat him. Thus it was easy to quit for the time. He got up.

"Well, thanks, and think it over."

Maryam came to her feet with gracefulness that made him think of those wedge-faced Egyptian cats. "I'll tell you, Harrod Flint, where you can find him—if you're man enough to go after him."

He licked his lips. While he had no false pride, no more face to lose, he still had horror of backtracking after a single step. "Doubtless many places the Khalifa's friend can go where—frankly—duty wouldn't allow me to follow. Gallantly losing my head is not bringing back a prisoner."

"You'd better report to Cairo that you can't carry on. He's gone to get Colonel Dayton. You're crazy enough to go to Omdurman as—let's say—a delegate from the Sultan of Turkey—or the Amir of Afghanistan—you're quite equal to such a trick, Simon always admired *you,* you know. But you'd do nothing but keep him from bringing the colonel back to Suakin alive."

Incredulity made his mouth gape for an instant. *"He's gone to Omdurman to rescue Colonel Dayton?* Impossible! Anything as fancy as a military governor, they'd keep him in a cage, right under the Khalifa's nose, for gloating, as it were, and to impress the emirs. He'd wear so many shackles a camel couldn't carry him, he couldn't move without a rattle you could hear a mile."

"Do you suppose Simon Carver doesn't know all that? This is once when you do not want to interfere with him. And, if he succeeds,—"

Flint, all alive with hope again, cut in, "Oh, marvellous! Then he can surrender, and face trial, and be sure of pardon."

Maryam sighed. "The British way. Arrest him with one hand, decorate him with the other—*maybe.* Thank you for calling, Mr. Flint."

He left, and he was happy she'd not offered him tea.

When the door had closed after Harrod Flint, Maryam said to her maid, "I'm worrying about that letter to Osman Digna. Call Marouf, while I write another."

"Aywah, sitti."

THE Somali woman had scarcely waddled from the room when Maryam went to a wall niche to get reeds, inkwell and paper. Curled up on the bench, she penned a full page. She was reading it back when a grizzled, tight mouthed Arab came in, so silently that only the intentness of his eyes made her aware of his arrival.

She fluttered the paper, laid it down, reached for the sand-sprinkler to blot it. "Marouf, how much would you risk for the Father of the Scourge?"

The stern face did not change. Marouf touched his finger tips to forehead, lips, and chest, bowing as he did so. "Allah sets the limit, not I."

"He goes into great danger."

"I'm too old to go with him these days."

"But alone, you know ways no caravan can take?"

"That is right, *sitti.*"

"And you'll risk them?"

"On my head and eyes."

"Then take this letter. Find Osman Digna—maybe he's at Adarama, possibly at Gros Rejeb, but most likely he's going down the river toward Berber to join Emir Mahmud. Keep this letter. Don't give it to Osman Digna until the Father of the Scourge has got out of Omdurman with Colonel Dayton, the governor-*bimbashi.*"

The thin lips twisted in an almost-smile. "Clearly not, *sitti,* not until he

is well on the way."

"You'll hear soon enough when the Father of the Scourge leaves Omdurman."

"There will be much to hear," Marouf agreed, dryly. "Osman Digna will be one of the first to know, he's the one man to catch anyone trying trails caravans can't use."

"No one must know of this letter till the right time. Be sure someone reads it to you, before you deliver it. Now wait, I'll get a present for Osman Digna."

She went out, and quickly returned with a sturdy pouch of *dik-dik* hide. It contained over four pounds of gold, sovereigns, guineas, and *louis d'or*. The old man hefted it, cocked his head at the muted jingle, and said, "This is a better present than the Khalifa will give Osman Dinga."

"Are you sure you can hide my letter?"

"*Aywah,* and from all but God. If you will be pleased to seal it in oiled silk, I'll slit a camel's hide, and sew the letter in. That way, no one'll find it, no matter how they search me."

All this was done; and later, Harrod Flint, who never took discouragement seriously, realized that watching Maryam's house had not been a waste of time. He was quite content when he saw Marouf ride out, to become a diminishing dust cloud in the thorn laced desert. He picked a fly from his glass of *raki,* gulped the remainder of the fiery liquor, and paid the Greek. Then he made for the causeway, and tried to decide whether or not it would be worth while talking to Irene Dayton.

"Better save her until she'll be useful," he concluded.

It hadn't been a bad day at all: for in discussing Irene, Maryam had confirmed what thus far had been only one of Harrod Flint's guesses.

CHAPTER XII

EVEN before the rumor was whispered in the market place, Carver knew that bad news would soon break; like everyone else, he developed a growing urge to look over his shoulder as he went about. He was tense, as from waiting for a blow which he could not dodge. Riders had come to the capital by night: he himself heard them, and had seen the snaky necks and ungainly shapes of camels silhouetted against the white walls of the Mahdi's tomb.

These riders had come quietly, and they had not left the Khalifa's palace. Just that, yet enough, and more than enough to start guesses.

Then, the Khalifa had not appeared to lead his people in prayer the following day. His brother, Yakub, had announced from the *imam's* niche, "Our lord, Sidi Abdullahi, he is ill, but it is nothing serious, praise be to Allah."

He could have done better. This set people asking themselves, "If not serious, then why not come to lead us in prayer?"

Those who resented the overbearing Baggara Arabs, the Khalifa's kinsmen, hoped that the master of the Soudan was fatally sick, but did their best to conceal such hopes: this might be bait to trap the unwary malcontent.

Bit by bit, the entire city became certain that there had been a disastrous defeat, somewhere near Berber. Details leaked out, such as, that Emir Mahmud's army, instead of butchering Kitchener's troops, had been driven at bayonet point from a fortified camp softened by an hour of bombardment by artillery, that Osman Digna as usual had fled, his command intact, instead of wasting men in a futile fight. The emir, captured by the victors, had been marched through the

streets, wearing a placard inscribed, THIS IS MAHMUD WHO SAID HE WOULD CAPTURE BERBER.

Despite threats, penalties, and precautions, word brought by the silent couriers filtered into the bazaar, to pass from booth to booth.

Carver's men, squatting on the floor, regarded him questioningly. He finally had to say, "Colonel Dayton can't be in town, or we'd know of it by now. He's either dead, or the British have rescued him."

"Or," one of the Hadendowa suggested, "old Osman Digna still has him."

"What for?" Carver demanded.

The man answered with heavy irony, "To give as ransom for Mahmud!"

The emir and Osman Digna had always clashed, with jealousy on one side, and contempt on the other.

"Then we wait, Father of the Scourge?" another asked.

"Until we know where to go. Once we leave without permission, it won't be fun coming back."

"That's Allah's own truth," they agreed.

Then the *ombayas* bawled and bellowed; the drums roared in the square. Carver cocked his ear, and relaxed. "No, not general muster—not call to arms——"

"Listen, criers are going out——"

BULL voiced men stepped off, following the avenues which fanned from the plaza. "Hear with all your ears! Hear and obey! Whoever can walk, let him go to morning prayer. Hear with all your ears, hear and obey! Obey or know the wrath!"

The deep voiced sing-song echoed and re-echoed. The word was passed from quarter to quarter. It shook the hovels on the narrowest lanes of the walled section; it reached to the suburbs, and went thence to the straw shacks which girdled the city. Only the dying or the helpless were exempt.

"——Or know the wrath——"

That is, be flogged to death with sticks of thorn-brush.

When the Khalifa had something to say, he wanted a packed house.

Carver said, "I'm going to prayer. You can suit yourselves."

The Hadendowas wagged their heads. "It is written, *prayer is better than sleep*. Clearly, he'll make it much better!"

In the morning, Carver and his men found places in the enormous brick walled inclosure, where they laid their weapons on the hard packed earth in front of them. Company after company of *mulazemin* marched to their posts, at the right and the left of the square niche where the Khalifa would stand. On the extreme right, his brother, Yakub, waited with leading emirs of the Western tribesmen; on the left, a good many of Yakub's men, some of Ali Wad Helu's Arabs, as well as Jaalin and Danagla tribesmen.

Not long after the mosque was jammed, the ivory trumpets brayed. When the hoarse blast ceased echoing, the only sound Carver heard for a moment was the thin, dry hissing of sand blown from the open plains. It was not until he realized how tension made him hold his breath that Carver could quite understand the silence. Twenty thousand darvishes stood without stirring until a hinge whispered, and a heavy wooden door opened from the eastern wall of the mosque. This was the Khalifa's private entrance, leading from the courtyard of the palace; and Abdullahi stepped through, followed by the standard bearer who carried the great black flag of the ever-victorious Mahdi.

Deliberately, Abdullahi took his

place in the niche, and for a moment regarded his followers. He unslung the long sword whose hilt rose above his shoulder, and laid the weapon on the pulpit. He said, "We propose a prayer of four bows." A pause, during which each of the gathered thousands repeated the "intention"; then, *"BISMILLAHI Rahmani Raheem!* In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate . . . *El hamdu lilabi rabbi 'l-alameen* . . . Praise be to God, Lord of both worlds . . . *Maliki yaumideen* . . . King of the day of judgment . . ."

THEY knelt, touching the earth with their foreheads; they straightened up, and once more, chanted with the Khalifa. Another *rukka*, which made the hard earth rumble from the touch of hands and heads: and again, the thunder of voices. The sound stirred Carver, for as the ritual went on, unison became more perfect so that toward the end, he knew that there was no more doubt in these darvishes; that they believed, for faith and ferocity and purpose rang in every syllable of the sonorous Arabic. Doubters, at first mechanically reciting, had been swept with the current: faith, once again affirmed, flamed up. For a little while, these black men and brown men spoke to Allah, and they heard Him answer.

Although there were thousands who did not understand a single word they pronounced, the very sound moved them, until they knew the truth which the Prophet had spoken, thirteen centuries ago, when he said, "Paradise is in the shadows of spears!" The magic of the Arabic tongue, the language of Allah, could ignore the mind, for it spoke to the heart: and however bad the news, these men would go into battle with swords and spears to face artillery and machine guns—and with a good chance of breaking the British square, as they had done in times past.

Silence followed, and now, not from breath held back, but from the vision each man saw. There might have been a vast archangel behind Abdullahi, overshadowing him with wings and flaming sword; Azrael, Death's own angel, welcomed, and welcoming.

Carver shook his head to clear it, and blinked, and became himself again. He saw only that stern gray man standing before a black banner embroidered in white characters; a man wearing a skullcap, and a cotton tunic on which had been sewed four patches symbolizing poverty, and devotion to the Victorious Faith.

The Khalifa took his hands from the leather bound Koran, and picked up the sword in its red scabbard. Palms up he held it, instead of drawing, as was the custom, to preach with bare steel in hand.

"It has come to me," he began, very slowly, letting the words roll and boom from deep in his chest, though no man's voice could make himself understood to the uttermost fringe of the crowd. "It has come to me that there are doubters. That there are unbelievers. That there are those who speak of defeat. Those who say we were beaten at Nakheila.

"These words are the words of Satan the Stoned. *To the Lord of the Daybreak, I betake me for refuge from Satan! And from the spells of wizards who mutter. And from the evils of darkness. And from the envy of the envier when he envieth.*

"Verily, many died at Nakheila, and Mahmud was captured. But this was because they disobeyed me, and had little faith in the Divinely Sent Mahdi, upon whom be the Peace, and the Blessing!

"Verily, Allah punished them. But thousands of the infidel were cut to

pieces. Men of little faith, is it not clear why Mahmud was captured? So that the infidel who fled faster than we could chase would be proud, and encouraged to come nearer to Omdurman. There, in one great battle—was it not prophesied, was it not said by the Mahdi that the infidel were to be destroyed within sight of Omdurman, his holy city? How then could Mahmud destroy them at Nakheila?

"Men of little faith, the news that comes to you is proof of Allah's blessing, proof of victory on the appointed day, on the day of fate! Yea, how infidels' bones will whiten over all plains! How Jehannum will open with great flame to roast their souls!"

He pointed to the door through which he had come; and the arresting gesture checked the roar which was about to burst from twenty thousand fanatics. "Behold who comes out of the east to be a witness! Yea, the chief of the infidels!"

TWO black men, gleaming like velvet, and bare to the waist, drove a man before them. They were nearly seven feet tall, and so broad that they could just pass through the doorway, shoulder to shoulder. The sun twinkled on the leaf-shaped blades of the spears they levelled to prod the prisoner.

He wore a red uniform, with gold epaulettes, and gold aiguillettes. His chest gleamed with orders, decorations, and gilt cross-belts. Beside him trotted a naked brown boy carrying a tray on which lay an officer's sword whose blade had been broken in half.

The prisoner in British full dress held his head high. His face was blank, his mouth tight. His ruddy tan had become a dirty ash-gray from the extremity of his fury, for he was not afraid. And as he moved, iron clanked. Whenever he stumbled from the tangle of links, each heavy and span-long, the spearmen prodded him. About his shoulders, draped as in mockery of aiguilletes and cross-belt was a festoon of crudely forged chain. With one hand, he had to hold a length, as a bride might gather the train of her gown when she danced.

Carver, well toward the front, saw that his search had ended; Colonel Dayton, weighted with a hundred pounds of iron-mongery, clank-clanked up the steps of the platform and with bitter-bleak eyes, faced the crowd.

Dayton had ridden into the field wearing khaki; but the Khalifa had him tricked out for the best effect. He looked somewhat like pictures of Kitchener in full dress. The Khalifa hadn't said, "Behold the *Sirdar!*" Cunningly, he left it to his people to guess that this important man must be the Commander in Chief of the British-Egyptian army.

The sound and the sight still held the Darvishes silent. Then, with a practiced move, beautiful in swiftness and drama, Abdullahi whipped out the straight bladed sword, flaring diamond-wise toward the point, which for four centuries had been one of the chief treasures of the kings of Darfur; the Crusader sword, part of the dowry of Makbula, the king's daughter, when she came to marry Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi of Allah.

The sun was now high enough to reach into the canopy over the pulpit. Light blazed the full length of the shimmering steel, until it became a vast flame reaching from the Khalifa's hand.

He said not a word. Had he spoken, he could not have heard himself; for the eruption of voices would have drowned the blast of field guns firing in battery.

"Din! Din! Ed-din mansur! The Victorious Faith!" They howled, they roared, they shouted; the ground shud-

dered as they surged forward.

The *Mulazemin* tightened up, and levelled their spears lest the fanatics close in to tear the infidel to pieces. Abdullahi, with strength and skill beyond any that Carver could remember, shifted his grip, so that the cross guard of the two-handed sword rested in his palm, and the point flashed back, reversing its position; an instant's pause, and it flickered home, all the way into the red scabbard.

A curtain fluttered down from the canopy rim, hiding the Khalifa, and the prisoner. Feeling as if he had been clubbed over the head, Carver was carried by the press of fanatics as they made for the arched openings in the mosque walls.

Stunned, half-stifled, and for the first time fully realizing the wildness of what he had set out to do, Carver was nevertheless glad that he had come; regardless of Irene, he had to save the man he had tricked into captivity.

CHAPTER XIII

ALTHOUGH parading Colonel Dayton had fooled the rank and file, a good many emirs not in the Khalifa's inner circle would surely suspect a hoax; yet they would sustain it to get the most out of their troops in the coming battle. That the remnant, as the Khalifa put it, of the British-Egyptian forces would reorganize and continue on their advance to Omdurman now seemed entirely sensible to the Darvish population. The infidels and the "Turks" would try to rescue their captive leader, whom the divinely guided Khalifa had used to bait them to the battlefield of the prophecy, five miles north of the capital.

Carver said to his men, when they returned to their quarters, "I talked to Abdullahi and fished for information. I told him Osman Digna had captured the military governor of Suakin. He's likely to begin wondering if we'll start chattering about who the prisoner really is. Enough such talk, and no one'll believe Dayton's the *sirdar*. And the Khalifa wants everyone to believe that he's got someone important, and not just a colonel no one ever heard of except in a town that might as well be in another world. So be careful what you say."

"It's not what we say, it's what he thinks we might say."

"That's all too right," Carver admitted. "We may all be herded to jail. But don't run out. He's more likely to lock me up, and put you into the army. And you can desert in a hurry. Go over to the British. That's something I can't do, but they'll treat you right."

"*Wallah,* and if we don't like them, we can desert."

"You can," Carver said, "and probably will. So if I get into trouble, take it easy, don't make things worse."

The level eyes the thin, angular faces, the confidently poised heads assured him that whatever his men did, they'd not stampede; each, picked from many, could act on his own account. With any other kind, a slave trader wouldn't reach the end of his first march. So, while he did not for a moment ignore the newly developed danger, Carver had lost no confidence.

"Listen with all your ears," he went on. "This is what has come to me. I'll make myself useful to Abdullahi before he has a chance to start wondering about us."

"*Sahib,* what you do is good. But are you sure he'll be wondering?"

Carver took his camel stick and thumped it against the floor. "O Man! Have any of the beaten troops come to Omdurman? They have not. Only the secret riders. Their emirs are

afraid of losing their heads. But a lot of them must have got away after the battle. So, they're being herded into Osman Digna's country, along the Atbara River. Some level headed emir figured that out, to keep a lot of gabbling fellows from coming to Omdurman and getting the local army worried."

"By Allah," they agreed, "that is the true truth. Abdullahi is not happy from his thinking."

WITHIN the hour, Carver had asked for, and got permission to call on the Khalifa. He found Abdullahi in high spirits. It was as if the man had been stimulated by the nonsense he had imposed on his followers.

"Seeing you is a coolness to the eyes, Father of the Scourge," he said, amiably. "Sit here with me, it is good to see you."

Carver waded through compliments, knee deep, until he got his opening; then, with an airy gesture to indicate the secretaries, pages, councillors, and *qadis* in the room, he asked, "You trust all these?"

"They know my thoughts as well as I know them. What has come to you, Father of the Scourge?"

"In Suakin, I heard British officers talk about the new explosive, Lyddite, they call it, it is named after the infidel who invented it. One shell will blow up a house. It has ten times the strength of the old kind. It scatters pieces all over the field, the sharp pieces of steel are flying swords, they sing, they whistle, they buzz. What the blast doesn't knock flat, the pieces cut in half."

"Why didn't you bring me some?"

"They don't sell it. The smugglers couldn't get any. They make it only in Frangistan, where the infidels live. Now, Mahmud could have captured some, if he'd not been captured himself, but Allah does what he will do."

"Mahmud!" The Khalifa spat. "That father of little pigs, if the infidels don't skin him alive, I'll behead him, I'll hang the dog-lover, I'll flog him to death with thorns, I'll—"

"Mahmud," Carver boldly cut in, "couldn't help it. How much artillery did he have?"

Abdallahi frowned, fingered his fringe of beard. "Maybe half a dozen seven-pounders. Those little brass guns, the rifled ones."

"So, the infidel shot at him with Lyddite, he had nothing for answering back. The infidel foot soldiers became brave from the sound of their own big guns. Some of them throw a shell weighing forty pounds."

"We have no such big guns."

Carver cocked his head, and smiled craftily. "We have a good many Krupp guns, and some Nordenfeldts. No Lyddite, but what we do have, it makes plenty of noise, it encourages the men. Why not use all the artillery in the warehouse?"

Abdullahi drew a deep breath. "What you say is true. And this is why we don't. In the old days, when we besieged Khartoum, we used artillery. But the officers who understood it have gone to the mercy of Allah. So we fight with what we do understand."

"When I was a boy, in my own country, I saw them shoot cannons," Carver told him, truthfully enough; then, improving on the facts, he continued, "Once the soldiers let me help them load and fire. Most of the gun crew had been killed. Now this was a long time ago and the guns you have are not like those we had, but as long as you point the cannon at the enemy, you do something. Even if you only kick up dust and make noise, it bothers him, and your spearmen can get closer without being hit."

"If you can shoot such guns, then good, let it be done! This infidel," the smiling Khalifa said, without warning, "who is the fellow?"

"My men think it is the *Sirdar,* Kitchener. As for me, I don't know who he is."

ABDULLAHI smiled appreciatively. "O, thou father of lies! But a good answer, my friend, a wise answer. Never even dream that that eater of dung is only military governor of a town that God forgot, and Satan despised."

"Have you asked him to become a True Believer?"

"With the sword at his throat . . ."

"Still wouldn't repeat the profession of faith?"

"Stubborn, and brave." The Khalifa's eyes narrowed. "Possibly he didn't understand us, he knows not much Arabic. Maybe you could convince him in his own language."

"Not one of your clerks or secretaries speaks English?"

"I'm glad they don't! I'd've put his head on a spear, only, you might persuade him. And *that* would give the infidels something to think about."

"And encourage our own men," Carver added.

"*Aywah!* Especially that. Go now and talk to him."

"Suppose he does become a Moslem?" Carver persisted, though the Khalifa had already turned to greet another caller. "What will he get?"

Abdullahi answered, severely, "Escape from the fires of hell."

"The British believe in a heaven of their own, no other tribe can hope to get into it, no matter what faith they have. Giving this one his life didn't interest him. Ease up on him a bit, that'll make him less pig-headed, he'll quit shutting his ears to the truth."

"Very well, then—tell him—tell him I'll take off the chains, provided he'll give me his parole as an officer and a gentleman. That scoundrel of a Slatin ran away, but he wasn't an Englishman."

A wave of the hand, and Abdullahi was addressing an emir.

A squad of *mulazemin* escorted Carver to the prison, which was in the southeast corner of the walled quarter of Omdurman, overlooking the Nile.

One mile to the ferry: bribe a guard, and cross the White Nile, over to Khartoum. No, better drift downstream to clear Tuti Island, make the east bank, and meet Aswad. But first figure a way to get Colonel Dayton out of prison.

The captain of *mulazemin* readily got admission. Carver, however, was looking forward to carrying on his missionary work with such regularity that instead of having an escort, each visit, he'd get a written order from the Khalifa, a permit to preach, as it were; which would finally have uses other than theological.

The ponderous gate swung out. The sentries formed at either jamb, rifles pointed into the compound, to stop any rush of captives. Their precaution was only a gesture; to Carver, stepping into the stench and congestion of the court, it was plain that jail breaks were not a live problem.

Prisoners, most of them wearing shackles, squatted in the shade of the wall. The court was dotted with brick hovels into which they were crowded each night. Not a man budged when Carver and his escort came in. Ragged, filthy, bereft of all hope, they sat and stared. Those not manacled seemed as helpless and woe-begone as those who were weighted with chains, or who had only fetters connected with hobbling links. Worse than the reek of sweat and offal was the overpowering sense

of oppression which made Carver's shoulders slump as though an actual burden weighted him.

Whether a new prisoner came in, or whether guards had come to take someone to the execution ground, it made no difference to those who sat and stared. Yet they weren't emaciated; contrary to reports, the Khalifa didn't starve them.

HERE and there, Carver saw groups of Greek and Italian and Austrian traders. These poor devils had been captured at the fall of Khartoum. Thirteen years, and beyond hope of release. For all his bitterness against the British "liberators", Carver forgot himself, and wished that he could go over to those forgotten men to say, "Buck up, there's an army on the way, they may not win, but it's a chance."

The captain spoke to the chief of the watch. The latter pointed, saying, "Over there, *sahib*. By Allah, of course we took off the red uniform."

Glance followed the gesture, Carver recognized Colonel Dayton, sitting near a hut little larger than a dog-house. He wore all his many yards of chain, and a darvish *jubba;* old, filthy, probably stripped from one of the executioner's victims. The most substantial part of it was the symbolic patches.

Carver spent a moment groping for the composure he needed: for though he had not planned this, it was nevertheless his work. Eloping with a stuffed shirt's unhappy wife was one thing: sending him to such a den of despair was something else. More than ever, Carver was glad that Irene had refused to sail. With this between them, they would surely have ended hating each other.

"Colonel Dayton," he said, sharply, when the bowed head did not rise. "I've something to tell you."

Dayton looked up. His glance shifted to Carver's feet, deliberately travelled the length of him, finally centered on his face. "I have seen you before. Once was enough. Plenty of your own kind here, if you must have company."

Though he did not move enough to make even the faintest tinkle of chains, Dayton seemed to have gone elsewhere. What remained was a solid, square jawed man whose body was in bondage; since it had to suffer, it had to, and what was that to *him?*

"Colonel Dayton, hear me out. I come from the Khalifa."

"Daresay you're an efficient little worker." Dayton's tight mouth and straw colored moustaches twitched in a smile of detached amusement. "Did nicely by me. Though I might have known Osman Digna wasn't there. Merely some filthy subordinates."

He looked Carver fully in the eye, and smiled a little more. Then, precisely and deliberately, he spat on Carver's tunic. A guard lashed out with his whip. The hippopotamus hide did little damage, for Dayton was armored by the chains which bent his shoulders.

"Shabash!" Carver struck the guard aside. "This is between me and him . . ." Then, to the captive: "You're being childish, sir. Is it my fault you muddled horribly when you went out with horse, foot, and artillery? Don't be an ass! You outnumbered the darvishes two to one, I'll bet."

Dayton considered for a moment. "Dare say you're right. Still doesn't make your company acceptable. If I'm to be flogged or hanged, have at it—what I mean is, conversation isn't essential."

"I see you're wearing a *jubba.*"

"Bloody bastards stripped me to the buff. *You're* wearing one from choice. I say now, since I can't get rid of you, speak up, get it over."

"You don't speak Arabic?"

"Well, rather not!" Dayton answered, proudly. "Except *ruh, imshi, mafeesh,* and a few other positively necessary expressions. Am I to understand you're here to teach me that uncouth language?"

CARVER felt the concentration of stares. It was as though spear points menaced him between the shoulder blades. The *mulazemin,* having stepped back a few paces, were watching him, not the prisoner. Carver hunkered down on the rammed earth, and asked, casually, "Did any darvish explain the advantages of el-Islam to you? I mean, in language you could understand?"

Dayton spat, though this time not at his visitor. "They used sign language. You've come to improve on that?"

"I have, sir. The Moslem faith contains nothing which is repulsive to a Christian. Bear with me, presently I'll explain myself as to details. The Five Pillars of the Faith are prayer, fasting, alms-giving,—"

"Never mind the rest! Confounded rot and nonsense."

"Colonel Dayton, be good enough to hear me out. The Khalifa doesn't expect you to become a devout Moslem. He knows I am not. But if you'll make the profession of faith—it's quite harmless—*La ilaha illa Allah wa Muhammad rasul allah.* That is, there is no God but the One God, and Muhammad is the apostle of God. Very well, we all agree as to the first part, and neither of us has any proof that Muhammad is not—"

"My good man, I am not here for theological hair splitting. Religion is largely blasted nonsense anyway, but can't you understand—dash it all, one simply doesn't run around, changing one's religion. Even an American should have that much decency!"

Carver drew a deep breath. He didn't know whether to admire the man, or kick him in the teeth. Instead of doing either, he said with calmness that cost him an effort, "See here, Colonel! I didn't come to this jail for fun, it's depressing and stinking. You haven't told me I'm a renegade, and don't bother. Let's stipulate that, as the legal chaps would put it. I hope that Kitchener's army gets its pants blasted off, and that you meddlers learn once for all to keep your noses out of the Soudan. Does that make my stand clear?"

DAYTON smiled, and was almost amiable. "Forthright statement. By Jove, you do hate us," he added, cheerily. "Times when I feel that way myself. Contemptible idiocy, this talk of avenging Gordon. The man was quite mad, jolly well served him right, getting speared . . . And the Soudan's not worth a damn. You interest me, pray continue."

"Make the profession of faith. Give the Khalifa your parole. No sense sitting around looking like an iron monger's shop."

"The Khalifa's not a gentleman. Can't give him my parole. As an officer in Her Majesty's Service I'm required to exert every effort to escape. You're not dealing with another Slatin—the bounder accepted the silly religion, swore allegiance, and now that the contemptible scoundrel's escaped, he's guiding Kitchener to Omdurman." He drew a deep breath. "I'm afraid you can't quite get the point. You're no more gentleman than the Khalifa or Karl Rudolph Slatin."

Whereupon Dayton dummied up. He crouched there, ignoring the vermin crawling in his tunic. He was a mass of British will, concentrated under a hundred pounds of hardware. Improv-

ing his condition didn't interest him. Carver said, helplessly, to the *mulazemin*, "Take me away from here, he won't listen."

They said, with awe and admiration, "Yea, the tax collectors of Frangistan must have flogged him by the hour before he'd pay a single *riyal*."

No proper man ever paid a penny until he'd been slashed to ribbons with a *kurbaj*. Pig-headedness was esteemed in the Soudan, and Carver, going with his escort, felt that of the two, they considered Dayton the better man. Maybe they were right.

When he was almost at the gate, Dayton thought of something to say: "Tell that infernal scoundrel I demand quarters proper to a prisoner of war of my rank. And an apology."

He meant it, and he expected results. Carver could think of nothing to go him one better. As the prison closed, he was convinced that if, finally, he did by heart-breaking persistence get the load of chains lightened, did contrive to cut a shacklebolt to release the captive, did somehow bribe a clear path to the Nile, Dayton would refuse to go, because he would not be under obligation to a renegade.

"I'll have to kidnap the son of a bitch," he said to himself, despairingly. "Tie him to a camel and haul him like a bag of gum."

CHAPTER XIV

THAT evening, after supper, Carver had another audience with Abdullahi, to whom he reported his failure. He concluded, "That is the way with the English. How many times did the Mahdi and yourself offer Gordon a chance to surrender?"

"Ten times, maybe twenty," the Khalifa answered. "And I told my men not to kill him when they rushed the wall to take Khartoum. They had to spear him, he came out to the palace alone, he had only a sword and a pistol, but he'd not surrender."

This was another version of a story whose entire truth would never be known. Whether saint, genius, martyr, or madman, it made no difference: General Charles George Gordon, "Chinese" Gordon, now served to point renegade's argument, and to make English psychology a little less insane to an Arab from Dar Fur.

"Does the Holy and Exalted Koran," Carver demanded, "say that you have to kill every infidel who won't accept el-Islam?"

"Certainly not!" Abdullahi answered. "Look how many infidels are in jail. The Mahdi spared them."

The answer was of course what Carver had expected. He said, "Gordon must have known all this. So when he wouldn't surrender, it was because he was a perfect soldier. Too many of his men had starved, had died in defending the town—he could not accept life, after he had sent so many to their deaths."

Abdullahi's expressive eyes became luminous with understanding. He seemed to see something beyond Carver, and the blank walled reception room, and the emirs and *qadis* who squatted on the floor, awaiting his orders. "Yes, by Allah," he finally said, eyes again focusing on Carver. "That I can understand. Gordon could not run to fight elsewhere, so he had to stand on his fur. Surely a man can not live beyond the day when his life has no meaning."

"Very well, *sidi*. This prisoner went out to catch Osman Digna, the man who always runs, and always comes back to fight again. He blundered into an ambush. Instead of catching, he was caught. A lot of his men were

killed because he didn't lead them well. But he stayed to fight, so some could get away. He was knocked from his horse, he was grabbed before he could stand. He didn't surrender. But if he listened to me, or to the doctors of law, that'd be surrender. So—"

"You speared Gordon. You can spear this one."

"It is not necessary."

"He was useful at the mosque. He looked like the *sirdar*."

"Enough to be useful," Abdullahi admitted.

"Showing him once at the mosque, that was good. The next time, he has to do something new."

"But what?"

CARVER frowned, as though he had not come with an answer. Finally he said, "I can't talk him into giving you his oath of allegiance. He'll not even repeat the Profession of Faith, unless I can trick him into it."

"You can trick him?"

"The Power is with Allah. I'm willing to try. Lock me up with him, so he has to listen to me. And after he has repeated the *shahed*, you can let him out of jail, and without losing face."

"*Aywah!* Even take off the chains."

"And, give him a proper uniform."

"Why?"

Carver answered, "Because then he'll really be useful for people to see. I'll show some of your emirs how to shoot straight with the Krupp field guns."

"You could do that without him.

"Your people would wonder why you didn't have me do that sooner."

Abdullahi frowned, then brightened. "*Hai!* That is easy. Because this is the first time a big army of infidels and 'Turks' is coming into the country."

"They're coming up the river, with gun boats, the same kind Gordon used," Carver said.

"We've started digging emplacements on the bank, for guns to fire back at them."

"I noticed those. But you shoot when the ship passes by, and then what can you do? With guns on wheels, you can start shooting a long way off, before the boats have anything to fire at, to shoot only broadside."

"You know how to hit a moving boat, coming up the Nile? If you had guns at Tuti Island?"

"Guns at Manati Island would be better, the enemy'll have a tough time no matter which side of Ausi Island they try to pass, they'll be going slow, and one after the other, in column."

"*Wallah!* That's right. But what good does the infidel do? He won't tell you things you don't know."

"Of course he won't," Carver agreed. "But let him stand by. In full uniform. Everyone'll think he's become a True Believer, has repented, and is helping us. That'll encourage the doubters you talked to at the mosque."

Putting it in such words left the Khalifa no chance to retort that there were no doubters in Omdurman; he went grim for a moment, but conceded, "True enough. When men wait for battle, they begin to worry. When do you go to the prisoner?"

"I'd go now, the sooner the better. But I'll have to tell my men. Otherwise, they'd run away, or they'd fight to a finish, they're wild as hawks."

"You mean my *mulazemin* couldn't arrest them?"

Carver looked the Khalifa squarely in the eye. "Your *mulazemin* are brave men, and you have enough of them to cut my handful to pieces. But that is not the same as arresting them. What other kind of men could have brought you cartridges, year after year?"

Since the Lord of the Soudan could

not argue against such logic, he made a brave show of applauding it.

"You have your *mulazemin*, I have mine. Very good, Father of the Scourge, go tell your men you volunteer to wear chains for el-Islam."

"A prisoner," Carver observed, "will listen to another prisoner sooner than to anyone else. As far as my men are concerned, you needn't worry about their leaving town. They'll stay as long as I'm here. All the more so while I'm locked up."

AND as he left the audience room, Carver was sure that however he had complicated the situation by his dissertation on the benefits of artillery, the benefits of making further use of Colonel Dayton to keep public morale keyed up to the highest pitch, he had also simplified things for himself.

The following day, Carver and the colonel, now shackled ankle to ankle, squatted against the wall of one of the masonry dog-houses in the prison court. His first remark, when the smith had finished upsetting the head of the rivet which linked him to the man he'd come to liberate, was a warning: "Be careful of what you say. One of the *mulazemin* who marched me in here, yesterday, knows enough English to read dispatches stolen from Kitchener's headquarters. We can't be sure but what some prisoner has been ordered to keep an ear cocked to what we're saying. I've come back to preach to you. But I'm also in Omdurman to get you out of here, and back to Suakin."

"Why'd a renegade try to liberate me?"

"Why," Carver countered, "would a renegade be chained in this hell's hole with you? Can't you take anything for granted?"

"Tried that once. That's why I'm here."

"Things can't go any worse for you," Carver pointed out. "But they can become lots worse for me. Whether or not you believe it, I came to Omdurman to get you out of here. Can you see any good reason for my lying about it?"

"Liars have the most unusual motives," Dayton complained. Telling me Osman Digna was lurking in the brush, that was reasonable. But what you're saying now is idiotic. Why'd you propose anything of the sort?"

"According to your lights, I'm a renegade. More than that, one of the most important in the entire Soudan."

This impressed Dayton. "Really?"

"There's no harm in telling you I am Abu 'l-Kurbaj, the Father of the Scourge. I've herded more niggers to the Red Sea than any living man except Osman Digna. A constabulary agent, Harrod Flint, came all the way from Cairo to find and arrest me. Naturally, he couldn't get any support from the Egyptian civil authorities."

"Naturally not, you'd have them bribed, all of them."

"Of course. So, he'd finally appeal to the military. Yourself."

"To be sure."

"So I got the military out of town, to give me a free hand in dealing with Harrod Flint." Carver's mouth set, and his eyes bored through the colonel. "I dealt with Flint, the only surviving white man who could under oath have identified me, wherever he might see me, as Abu 'l-Kurbaj. No matter what name I took, or wherever I went, Flint could always connect me with slave trading, and supplying the Khalifa with munitions. I had to have a free hand in dealing with Flint. So, I made the most of a rumor, and you snapped at it."

"And then," was the ironic retort, "you came here to spoil a splendid

friendship with the Khalifa, by trying to liberate me? And here you are, shackled, but optimism not a bit damped."

"Hear me out, sir. When I'd heard you'd been killed in action, I considered that that was what any military man expects. And no ambush ever did succeed except because it was blundered into, which you didn't have to do. But when I heard you'd been captured while trying to cover the . . . ah . . . retreat of your men—well, I knew what you'd face, and I couldn't laugh off my responsibility for the unexpected twist. So I'm here. And now I'm shackled to you because the Khalifa figures you might accept el-Islam if only to get away from a renegade."

DAYTON was too puzzled now to scoff. "You were a free man yesterday, you came within an ace of knocking down one of the Negroes about to lash me with his whip. And now you're here. But that talk of converting me, all that rot about el-Islam!"

"Pretend to be interested. Once you're free of your hundred pounds of iron mongery, there's a splendid change of riding away."

"That's quite absurd."

"Karl Rudolph Slatin walked out one night, wasn't missed till next morning."

Dayton snorted. "After he'd sworn allegiance! Thank you, no."

"You won't be swearing allegiance, nor giving your parole."

"I should hope not. Not to a low fellow like the Khalifa. I say, can you arrange for camels, as Slatin did?"

"How do you think I came here, on wings? Oh, to hell with all this talk, recite after me. The first chapter of the Koran. *Bismillahi rahmani raheem.*"

"*Bismillahi*—damn it all, I won't."

"Cross your fingers, never mind believing a word of it, but sound off, loud and strong. *Bismillahi*—

"BISMILLAHI—blasted nonsense!

"*Rahmani*—

"RAHMANI—idiotic drivel!"

"Good going, colonel. *Raheem. El hamdulilahi rabb il-alameen. Maliki yaumi deen. Rahmani raheem. Eeyaka nabudu wa eeyaka nastaynu.* It's like poetry—"

"I always loathed poetry. What does it mean, by the way?"

"Nothing you can't say with clear conscience, it's as decent as the Lord's Prayer. Fact is, I suspect it's an outright plagiarism of just that, the two have about the same meaning. Sound off with me, then they'll know you're learning."

Dayton raised his voice. However wretched the pronounciation, there was volume of which any adjutant in Her Majesty's service could have been proud. The prison walls echoed from the thunderous recital. On and on, over and over again; and finally, Carver said nothing; Dayton carried on until he realized he was going it alone. Then he skipped a beat, and protested, "I say, isn't this about enough?"

"Keep it up."

"The blighters are staring at us."

"All the more reason. Sound off!"

They kept it up all day. They paused only long enough to dip into the *dhurra* porridge which the jailer brought in that evening. Fellow captives began to object, but Carver yelled, "I'm converting an infidel, you'll get the hide peeled off your back for butting into this!"

At last the sergeant of the guard came in. "Enough is enough, in the name of Allah, save something for tomorrow."

Carver retorted, "O Man! Allah and the Khalifa do what they will, and I

am in chains. You'll be in as bad a fix if your piety is suspected. It is written—"

But the sergeant knew all too well what was written; helplessly, he went back to his post.

IN THE darkness, Carver caught the twinkle of Dayton's eyes. "I say, we're tormenting the silly bastards, how about some more devotion?"

Carver drew a deep breath. He wondered how long his voice would last . . .

The following morning, the Khalifa sent one of his secretaries to find out whether Dayton would make the profession of faith, and swear allegiance. Carver answered for the captive, "He's stubborn, but didn't everyone in the quarter hear him praying?"

"He kept everyone awake. People are objecting. Some of the emirs and *qadis*."

"Oh, they are? Singing, dancing, and music are against the rules, but since when isn't a man allowed to recite extra prayers?"

The secretary frowned, muttered, and went away without answering. Every so often, one of his colleagues was flogged for a silent vice, such as drinking dhurra beer, or smoking tobacco; but never for excess devotion.

Carver said to Dayton, "He'll send for us."

"But I positively refuse to—er—profess this silly faith, or swear allegiance."

"Maybe I can talk him out of that. Don't forget, there is such a thing as simply walking out of Omdurman. But not out of this hell's hole. So don't spoil any chance of living in a house, and guarded only by a few servants. I'm not suspected of being interested in leaving, least of all in helping any Britisher. Not with a hefty price on my head."

Dayton scowled. "I've considered that. I must make it plain I can't be under obligation to you. Happy to state that you helped me, but I won't let a personal favor influence me to take any official position in your behalf. Truth is, I'd be obliged to have you arrested if I ever saw you in Suakin, or any other place where I have a command."

"Colonel," was the cheery answer, "I'd not worry about that detail, not *yet*. If you ever get a company of soldiers that looked game to arrest me, we'll all have some fun."

Dayton studied him intently. "D'you know," he finally observed, "For an American and a renegade, you're almost a gentleman."

Carver spent a moment wondering what the liberated colonel would think when he found that Irene had flown the coop. In a way, the situation appealed to Carver's sour sense of humor, and yet, he was sorry for Dayton, who had apparently spent most of his life doing the right thing the wrong way. After a dozen years, he still did not, could not suspect that Irene was fed up with fixed attitudes, a life whose every triviality put her and her American ways entirely in the wrong. Yet Carver felt the need of a crumb of self justification, so he said to himself, "She was always mine, I'd never lost her except for British attitudes and pretenses! Like the rot that keeps this blockhead from switching religions and making it easy for everyone!"

Then he said, "Back to prayers, we've got them on the run."

CHAPTER XV

ABDULLAHI regarded Dayton with suspicion and disapproval, though he had relieved him of his hundred pounds of chain. He asked Carver,

"Has this man accepted el-Islam?"

The choice of words was encouraging: since Dayton might have become a Moslem, it would have been a violation of the Prophet's law to refer to him as an "infidel". Carver, making the most of the Khalifa's punctilious mood, turned to Dayton and said, "Testify!"

The colonel began, haltingly, *La ilahi illa Allahi,"* and stopped short. He looked the Khalifa full in the eye, and with an unwavering glance; his jaw set defiantly.

Abdullahi demanded, "What's the rest? Say the rest!"

Carver translated; Dayton replied, "Tell him that's all I am saying."

Carver explained, "He knows the rest but he won't say it. To say *wa Muhammad rasul Allahi* would be the same as swearing allegiance to you. As an honorable soldier, he can't do that."

"I've not asked him to pledge allegiance," Abdullahi countered. "Merely to accept el-Islam, the True Faith."

This was literally true, though full of traps; but Carver, aware of the risk, set out to snare the Khalifa with his own device. He answered, "The colonel says that it'd be pledging allegiance to you. You say it would not. With your permission, I'll ask your *qadis*—these doctors of law, sitting right here with you—to give an answer to what Colonel Dayton wants to ask. Have I permission?"

Abdullahi was rapidly losing patience, yet he could hardly refuse the request. Moreover, the doctors of law, being trained seals, could split a hair four ways to prove that whatever the Khalifa decided was in line with the Holy and Excellent Koran; so his frown eased off into one of those deceptively charming smiles.

"Permission is granted, Father of the Scourge."

But Carver wasn't quite ready. He said, "If the *qadis* agree with Colonel Dayton, will you promise by the honor of your beard to give him honorable captivity, and not hold it against him for refusing to turn against his duty as a soldier? And not punish him with chains or any other punishment?"

"If the qadis say he is right, then he is right, and I have promised, before witnesses. Speak!"

Carver turned to the learned doctors: "This man says that Abdullahi is the lawful successor of the Mahdi. Is that right?"

"Yes, by Allah!" they chorused.

"That the Mahdi of Allah was descended from Muhammad, on whom the peace and blessing, and on his family and on his companions. Is that right?"

"Verily, that is the truth!"

"That no one who accepts our Lord Muhammad can deny allegiance to Abdullahi the Khalifa?"

"Verily, that is the truth!"

THERE was nothing else they could say; denial would be a stab against the legitimacy of the Khalifa's rule over the Soudan, and against his claim that every Moslem in the world owed him allegiance. Carver faced Abdullahi: "Verily, they say that to accept Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah is only another way of pledging allegiance to you. And it is written that infidels captured in war may be held for ransom, or made to pay tribute, but not put to the sword. For Allah loves the generous!"

Abdullahi for once could not argue with his doctors of law; the very argument by which Turks and Egyptians were proved traitors and rebels had been turned against him. He dictated an order, handed it to one of his *mulazemin;* and guards marched Dayton

out of the room. Then Carver said, "*Sidi,* the whole quarter near the prison was kept awake while he repeated verses of the Koran. They'll assume he's become a Moslem. But if you put him back in chains, if you flog him or behead him, they'll know that you failed to convert him."

Abdullahi's brows rose; he couldn't contradict such logic. Carver hammered home his advantage: "Parading him in the mosque was good once, but it is no use a second time. Letting it seem that he is helping with artillery practice, that is good every day, as long as it looks as if he were there of his own free will. If this is wrong, do with me what you please!"

The Khalifa smiled, reluctantly. "Father of the Scourge, I was wrong when I offered to make you a leader of darvishes. You should be a *qadi,* you used these against me."

"The peace upon you, *sidi.* We all bow alike to the truth of the Noble Koran, and the words of the Mahdi of Allah."

But Carver was relieved when he got permission to withdraw from the Presence.

WHEN he returned to his quarters, he learned from the men who had not accompanied him that Dayton had been sent to a house near that of Emir Yakub, the Khalifa's brother. There the prisoner of war would be under double scrutiny, that of the servants assigned to him, and that of the emir's servants. Rudolph Slatin's trick of simply walking out, one night, would be hard to duplicate; even with the advantage of having Aswad waiting across the Nile with the fastest camels in the Soudan, months of watching for the right moment would be necessary. Meanwhile, Kitchener was coming up the Nile, and if his army did win the coming battle, the British would liberate Colonel Dayton. As far as Irene was concerned, all Carver's work would have been in vain; as he saw it, he could win only by undoing through his own efforts what had accidentally come of sending Dayton to snare Osman Digna.

That night, he sent Farouk, the most shadow-footed and one of the most cunning of his men, to cross the Nile. "Tell Aswad that we don't know when, or how it will happen. But that it'd be a good idea to watch the artillery practice. And have an 'ark' ready and waiting, every night. In case the colonel goes walking and sees his chance to take a swim."

The wedge-shaped man grinned as he repeated the message. And later, he set out, to pick his way through the gloom and the smells of Omdurman. Boat building was permitted only under government license. Farouk, however, had not forgotten in the desert what his ancestors had learned from the Nile. Silently, and despite all sentries, he'd cut bullrushes, and made a man's sized version of the "ark" in which young Moses was afloat when he met Pharaoh's daughter.

Hours later, he returned, silently as he had gone. He told Carver, "I hid the ark in an undercut, right where the second gully past Wad Helu's house joins the river. Maybe the colonel can manage to get lost on his way from the nine o'clock prayer. They'd hunt him awhile before turning out the night watch."

Carver considered and agreed, in part. "They would be in a sweat, and he could be gulped up by the rush from the mosque. Only, it's too soon for guards to be careless. Too soon to bribe. But if he spent a lot of time each night, praying or reciting, there'd be a chance."

"How, sahib?"

"As long as they heard *someone* droning away, they'd be off guard. It'd put them to sleep, they'd not wake up till the noise stopped. I could—later—go to teach him some more. And let him walk out while I took his place."

"*Mashallah!* But how'd you leave?"

"Surprise—and a good horse. Malika can show her heels to anything in Omdurman. Then camels for the long run. They'll be chasing hoofbeats in the dark, while he's floating across the Nile, to meet Aswad."

As Carver saw it, the sturdiest Englishman would be a handicap in a sprint for the murderous Bayuda Desert, which was inclosed by a gigantic loop made by the Nile; however they disguised Dayton, desert patrols would sense his foreignness from afar, whereas Carver and his Hadendowa were a part of such country. A few shots would discourage snoopers. Likewise, where patrols or nomads sighted Carver, they'd carry a report as to *harami*—outlaws—a routine incident, and nothing as unusual as a camel party which included one foreigner. So, by speed and daring, he might even cross the Nile at Metemma, before the Kalifa could warn his outposts.

Meanwhile, he'd see Dayton on the artillery range. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

JUST north of Khor Shambat, the largest of the *Khors* which slashed the plain and joined the Nile, Carver had lined up a battery of Krupp guns. All the inhabitants of Shambat Village had left their straw huts to watch the show. For gunners, there were emirs eager to learn how to knock out river steamers, or to bombard an enemy camp.

Abdullahi sat on a couch. About him were *mulazemin,* standing to horse; a dozen pages, four eunuchs, the standard bearer, the tall blacks with their elephant tusk trumpets, and the drummer who beat el Mansura, "The Victorious." And there were musicians trained in using the Turkish bugles taken from Egyptian troops.

Well behind this imposing array were hundreds of darvishes, spearmen and swordsmen, for aside from the picked men who guarded Abdullahi, no one bore firearms except at drill, or on the eve of battle. In this prohibition, Carver saw two possibilities: either darvish valor and overwhelming numbers would win the coming battle, or else, British musketry would mow down brave men who lacked practice with small arms.

Darvishes with pickaxes and shovels grubbed and dug. Their implements rang from striking rock in the hard earth. Carver glanced at the sun, and at the river. Far upstream, he could just distinguish the rafts which, when cut loose to float with the current, would represent gunboats. Then he made a show of getting advice from the Khalifa's prized possession, Colonel Dayton.

"Any suggestions, sir?"

Dayton looked through and beyond instead of at him. It seemed as though his release from chains and prison had given his face a permanently defiant set.

"Really nothing I could tell you."

"You might make a show of it. Point, do something. See here, Colonel! What I know about artillery wouldn't fill more than a very small manual, but I picked up enough, chatting with the American officers who used to coach the Egyptian artillery, years back, before I left Cairo."

The colonel's eyes came to sharper focus. His bronzed face twitched a little. His voice changed, and he said,

dryly, "Ha, that's right, you were once in Her Majesty's service."

"Come off your high horse! I guess you're developing scruples about something?"

"God damn it, yes! Here I am, wearing this uniform—a British uniform—and even though I am merely standing here, I am giving countenance to all this, aiding and abetting the enemy!"

CARVER drew a deep breath. "Nothing of the sort. You're standing here because armed men brought you here. The same as they could have strung you up to the gallows in front of the Mahdi's tomb. After all, you're not armed, no sabre, no pistol."

"The Negro behind me's carrying a sword. Very clever work. And this horse—grooms led him, but it looks for all the world—to those gaping blacks gathering about—as if I'd been shown a great distinction."

"The biggest distinction you've been shown is not having had your head lopped off! Fold your arms, stand at parade rest, and look wooden, we've had enough conference, as long as no one can understand what we've said!"

He turned his back on Dayton, and stepped toward the guns. The holes in which the trail-spades were to seat, to keep the recoil from rolling the pieces a hundred yards to the rear, were finally deep enough. Carver took the sights from their cases, set one in place, and let the emirs fit the others to the remaining guns. "You look through here, and see the target," he explained. "You turn this wheel to swing the gun right or left, to keep the cross lines on the target . . . Now this wheel—" He demonstrated, "Raises the barrel, or lowers it. The further the target, the higher you raise the muzzle. Exactly like shooting Remington or a muzzle loader or any *bundook*."

According to all military standards, there wasn't any problem at all; it was simply a matter of direct fire, at a target plainly in sight; no lobbing of howitzer shells over a crest at an invisible enemy far beyond it, and no complications that come into indirect fire. The emirs, however, were entering a new world, and they exclaimed, *"Mashallah!* It brings that *dom* tree so near I can see the nuts! *Wallah,* it's a spy glass like the Frangi use!"

Porters came up with boxes of shells. These had been polished and cleaned; they made a brave glitter. For a while, Carver demonstrated opening the breech, shoving home the shell, closing the breech. He had no range tables; the ammunition was stale; he depended on guessing, and judging the next shot accordingly.

Finally he went to the Khalifa to say, "We're ready. Whenever the targets are turned loose."

Abdullahi turned to the head man of those strung out, one every fifty yards, to a point near the joining of the Blue Nile and the White Nile. From mouth to mouth, the call would go: The Soudani telegraph.

And then Colonel Dayton took a hand. "I say, you blasted fool, where are the sandbags?"

"What sandbags?"

"For the gunners to crouch behind, and for yourself. In case of a muzzle burst. And I'd like one myself."

"Sorry you're afraid, Colonel!"

"Why, you insolent beggar! It's merely that I can't stand by and see you blow up a gun crew, even if they are Negroes!"

Abdullahi, who had not yet given the signal, wanted to know what the argument was about. His English-speaking *mulazemin* had been completely baffled by the furious and rapid exchange; he looked embarrassed and guilty, and

clearly expected the Khalifa to have him flogged at once.

Carver answered, "The colonel says guns sometimes explode, and the men firing them ought to lie behind sandbags when the Lanyard is pulled.

"Very good! Let bags be brought, right now! But you'd better not make any mistakes."

COURIERS rode to get bags. Fortunately, there were sandy stretches, here and there, so that it was easy to fill them. Meanwhile, Abdullahi and his suite had moved well back. Dayton kept his post, and stood there, arms folded. His horse holders fidgeted, squirmed, but did not dare quit their station without being ordered to do so; and the Khalifa had no time to think of trifles.

"Turn loose the targets," he commanded.

The first in the human telegraph sang out, "Yes, by Allah! The boats, let them float!" The next picked up the cry, "The boats, by Allah, let them float! And a third: "Yea, the boats! Let them float!" They droned, they sang; and having passed the call, they repeated, echoed it in lower voice; they felt important, having a say in big things. Finally, Carver saw the first of the rafts, logs lashed together, and topped with sticks and straw thatch to imitate the superstructure of the little steamers would bring the enemy upstream; steamers like the several which the Khalifa had seized at the sacking of Khartoum, and which he still kept moored to the quai of the ruined city. He could have used them to tow targets upstream, but thought, rightly enough, that the rafts would serve as well if they moved with the current.

They cleared Tuti Island, and Halfaya town, on the east bank; slowly, they swung into the western channel, between the near bank, and the banana shaped island in midstream. Good target, yellow brown dhurra stalks and straw, against a background of palm trees; and finally the Khalifa signalled with his hand. Carver, joining the cannoneers, behind the sandbag barricade, yanked the lanyard.

The gun roared, bucked, dug its trail into the hard earth, and went back into battery. Smoke billowed in choking clouds.

Ten seconds would elapse before the projectile reached the target. The darvishes craned their necks, then grumbled, "Allah! He missed it, he missed the whole river, and the island, too." Abdullahi scowled. Several emirs smiled broadly, and fingered their chins; they enjoyed seeing an upstart convert fumble. Carver began to feel uncomfortable. These were the longest seconds he had ever known. Each and every one of the ten had stretched and stretched.

Then a big puff of smoke and dust from the island. "Praise be to Allah!" he shouted, and watched the smirking emirs readjust their faces.

FINALLY the sound of the distant explosion rumbled back to the battery. While Carver had missed the slowly moving target, he had come close enough not to need an excuse. The cannoneers fell all over each other, swabbing the bore, and shoving in another shell. Carver relaid the piece, and fired again. The Khalifa, levelling a long brass telescope—some said it had been the one with which "Chinese" Gordon had used in directing the defense of Khartoum—made an encouraging gesture. "The shell," he called, "went through the straw deck-house before it exploded on the bank, it grazed the top. By Allah, that is good! Try again, sink it this time!"

All the retinue cheered, for when the Khalifa itched, all Omdurman began to scratch. Dayton, who had stood well back, as if commanding all four guns—though only one had thus far gone into action—came briskly forward. "I say," he demanded, brusquely, "let me have a go at this, you're bungling frightfully. I can damn well believe you watched American officers in Cairo."

"It's all yours," Carver answered. He was too irritated by the colonel's voice and words to wonder at the sudden change. "You command!"

Glancing back, he saw that the Khalifa was all smiles. The growing crowd of spectators, well in the background, began to surge against the line of spearmen posted to keep the firing line clear. Dayton snatched the sword, which his bearer had carried behind him, and unsheathed it. He flicked it to the "carry," as though to see whether captivity had cramped the suppleness of his wrist.

"Here, here, Carver!" he snapped, "see what those silly beggars are doing! They didn't swab that bore properly, tell 'em to try again."

Dayton wedged in, cocked his head, and when the ramming staff had been withdrawn, he equatted to look through the bore. He fiddled with the breech block, levering it up into place, then lowering it. He shook his head, disapprovingly.

"I'd not worry, sir," Carver growled, "that's one thing that can't let go, no matter how rocky the rest of the gun is!"

Dayton fussed and fumed. It seemed that despite his resolve not to help the enemy, his sense of professional decency overpowered him, so that he could not hold his peace in the face of bungling. Since Carver had actually done well, there was no harm in insisting that he also did things properly, according to the manual; and so Carver accepted the interference. But finally he said, in a low, fierce whisper, "Get back, you're getting in everyone's way, you're getting them confused!"

Dayton, sabre at the carry, started back to his post. Carver, impatient and irritated, depressed the gun a degree, took a little more "lead," as though shooting ducks, and yanked the lanyard.

What happened was for endless moments b e y o n d his comprehension. There was a stunning impact, as though he had been clubbed within a hairsbreadth of insensibility. Pressure threatened to collapse his chest. Flame lashed and licked about him; it had reached between the hastily stacked sandbags, to scorch his hair and his tunic. Despite the overwhelming fumes of explosive, he smelled the stench of burning hair and wool. Fragmentation whined and screamed and whistled. Dust blotted out earth and sky. The sun became a red blurr. Men shouted. Their voices seemed thin and cracked.

IT WAS a muzzle burst. This he knew as he still rolled from the impact, rolled with the black men who, for all the protection of the barrier, had been knocked sprawling. He clawed thorns and rock and sand. There was a cracking and tearing in his ears, and a chemical taste in his mouth. The sky, visible again as he scrambled to his knees, was bronze colored. Everything wove, reeled, capered about.

The darvish spectators were stampeding, howling, shaking the earth with bare feet and with sandalled feet. They bowled the guards over, or carried them along. Abdullahi had been swamped by the rush of his *mulazemin,* as they recovered from being knocked flat and breathless. Dayton was down, yet

somehow, still gripping the reins of the charger which had carried him to the field. The snorting, pawing animal dragged him about until he gained his feet.

Carver's wits tracked faster than his body. He knew, before he could really act, what was going to happen; he knew that Dayton also knew. There was no explaining the destruction to the Khalifa; there would be no way of convincing him that superannuated ammunition, while usually feeble, can often go to the other extreme, developing pressure enough to tear apart the strongest cannon. That the shock of the propelling charge could have done the damage, or that the bursting charge of the shell, cranky with age, might well have let go before it left the barrel. Dayton had been all too right in insisting on sandbags.

Also, Dayton knew that he'd be cut to pieces. The man in charge was responsible.

Malika broke from her groom. Carver lurched toward her, yelled hoarsely. It was as though she'd sought him in the panic; anything to get away from the howling darvishes.

All this happened in a few seconds. Carver was in action before fragments ceased spattering to the ground. A chunk of metal, smoking hot, tore a long groove down his leg, and another fell to slash his back. "This way, this way!" he yelled to Dayton, who had lurched into the saddle; Carver, mounting up on the run, wheeled the agile mare, and called, "Make for the river, that's our only chance! Ride for it, over that way, *that way*, you chump!"

Malika's shoulder blocked the colonel's mount, swung him toward the ravine. Dust still billowed, thickening the air. Darvishes, mounting up, were in pursuit, but blocked by footmen who brandished spears and swords. A few *mulzaemin* blazed away with Remingtons. One-ounce slugs droned past.

One darvish, the one of all that throng who had been near a horse, and who had also sensed what was happening, hammered along. He hurled a javelin as he raced; he hurled another, raking the colonels' mount. Malika, striking sparks with every bound, could have left him in the dust, but Carver held her in.

"Watch that—!" he yelled, "behind you!"

DAYTON ducked a lance thrust, and made a moulinet with his sabre. The pursuer rolled from the saddle, knocked senseless rather than slashed, for the weapon was dull. Then they came to the first Khor, and went clattering down the steep slope. Several riders were at their heels. Two blazed away, harmlessly, with smooth bore carbines. A footman, standing on the rim, cut loose with an elephant gun whose bellow was almost as loud as that of a small field piece.

"Upstream, right!" Carver shouted, as they got to the mouth of the ravine.

Here was clear going, while the pursuit, still thin, wove in and out among the boulders of the deep gully which led to the Nile. "By Jove," Dayton gasped, "you meant it!"

Carver didn't ask him the point of the remark; he was too busy to wonder. There was no pursuit coming down the next of the *Khors* which slashed the plain, but far inland, riders were plunging down, and climbing the opposite bank, to race across thorn dotted flats. None of them, fortunately, knew what the fugitives planned, and so could not anticipate or head them off. Confusion following the panic still helped Carver.

"Here it is!" he said, and piled out of the saddle. "Boat my man made. Get out of that coat!"

Dayton peeled out of his red tunic. Together they shoved the crazy little ark into the current. The darvish horse raced down along the bank. Malika plunged in for the swim.

"Grab a paddle, and keep down!" Carver directed.

"Damn small target we're making, this ark is nearly like swimming."

Dayton was right. It was not a boat, but a bundle of reeds whose core of pith gave buoyance. The entire sheaf, lashed together with withes, was almost submerged. For all the drive of two leaf shaped paddles, the ark inched along.

DARVISHES clattered up to the bank. They began shooting. Slugs peppered the river, some bringing up jets of water, others skating off with a high pitched whine. Then, far upstream, Carver saw the boats which were shoving off; wooden craft, licensed by the Khalifa. "Here's where our luck ends! They'll head us off."

"Providential, finding this ark, though it's little better than swimming," Dayton gasped, and ducked as a bullet whined downstream.

"Providential, my eye! One of my men put it there. How the devil you suppose I'd planned to get you out of town."

"Er—damn that beggar! Nearly nicked me—ah—you weren't spoofing, after all."

"If I ever get you on dry land," Carver snarled, "I'll beat your ears off; Lucky though you had sense enough to yell for sandbags, I guess that evens the score."

"Ah—hum—the truth is Carver—I arranged that muzzle burst—ah—couldn't deliberately blow you to pieces —" He grunted; a ricochet slug had slashed him. "Sorry—misjudged you —might as well tell you—before those bastards overhaul us—I felt it my duty —to discredit you—you did—too well —too—"

Dayton chuckled, flourished his paddle. "I say," he went on, cheerily, "Dozen or more camels—men armed with rifles waiting for us on the other side—daresay we'll be cut to pieces now, not the slimmest chance."

The riders on the east bank wheeled. Rifles levelled off, the volley was little short of professional. Dayton gasped, "By Jove! Missed us cold! Impossible!"

"They're shooting at the Khalifa's boatman, Colonel. Those are my men, the men you thought I was spoofing you about."

CHAPTER XVII

THE Omdurman side of the Nile was black with darvish horsemen; spear heads twinkled, swords gleamed, muskets blazed. Others raced downstream in pursuit of a file of cream colored camels. Despite the great distance, Carver recognized them and their riders, though only by their shapes, their speed, and the fact that they were in flight, not in chase. His men, on the alert, had at the first sound of disturbance mounted up to leave town. Whether they'd head on toward Egypt, or cross the river at Berber, they'd in the end be making for Suakin, and the desert routes which they knew he would take, if he got that far. They had no other choice. He'd win through or go down, long before they could have taken a hand.

So they rode, on those high bred camels, good for a hundred twenty or more miles a day; six hundred miles a week; not as fast on the sprint as a horse, but in a day's march, eating space as no horse could. And Carver, glancing back in his dash for the Atbara

River, was glad that those who had followed him into Omdurman had been able to leave.

Darvish patrols were on his heels, patrols which, already on the east bank of the Nile, had set out when the Khalifa's couriers crossed the river in swift, narrow boats. However, distance between Carver and the pursuers was greater than Remington range. Soon his dust hid him, and then the desert night. But Carver rode; he needed distance at any cost, and had to trust to luck and experience to gain his bearings at dawn . . .

When the sun came up to drive out the desert chill, there was no trace of pursuit. The face of the country told Carver why. So did old Aswad, saying, "Verily, no one comes into the land that Allah forgot. Those cut-off ones, they're riding along the trails, and what trail do we see here?"

The earth was red and barren, except for wide spaced clumps of mimosa, which at this season had not a leaf; only scraggly brush armed with thorns that would pierce any boot. Ruddy earth, spread thin over rocks, with rock cropping out; here and there, sandy stretches, marked by the feet of partridges. With drumming wings, these took off from the brush.

THE chill vanished as Carver scanned the horizon. There was a moment of pleasant warmth, then an evil billow of heat. In the distance, the air already shimmered and danced. Carver turned to Dayton, who now wore a jubba, and had a scarf wrapped about his head to replace the gold laced cap he had lost in the first moment of stampede. "I'll give you a camel and a skin of water," Carver said, "if you want to back track for the Nile and pleasant Omdurman. I'm afraid I'd not be welcome there, Abdullahi is blaming me for blowing up that gun."

"I'd not be popular either," Dayton said, smiling with grim good humor. "Is the country ahead as bad as all that?"

"Been bad enough if we'd left according to plan. You could go back, that'd blame it on me. The *mulazemin* who understands English, more or less, he'd understand if you insisted I put the evil eye on the gun. My staying away would clinch your argument."

Dayton studied him for a moment. "But you expect to keep on and get through?"

"I'm promising nothing. This is adventure. That is, bungling and blundering. When you know what you're doing, when you've calculated all the risks and prepared for them, it becomes business."

"Ha! Some seek adventure, some have it thrust upon them. But if you expect to make it, I'd be a silly ass to back down. After all, you've done nicely, these past dozen years."

"Because I've never taken a chance I didn't have to take," Carver answered. "A man is born with just so much luck. He gets a ration, so to speak. He eats his ration all at once, wastes it, he runs short when he needs it badly."

"By Jove! Interesting viewpoint. Novel, I might say."

"So," Carver continued, "if you really want to try the worst march I've ever faced, you won't be riding a camel. You'll be riding my luck."

"Er . . . I say, you forget I have some of my own."

Carver gave him a bitter look. "Colonel, that was a God-damned fool trick you pulled, blowing up that gun. You've used your luck ration. Nothing but mine will get you through."

"Dare say you're right. Er . . . you've not—what I mean is, you've not

ranted or stormed about—ah—my impulsive move. Frankly, I'm a bit at loss as to why you carry on with me. Candidly, I'd be—er—provoked, if I were in your place. It is still incredible, your proposing to liberate me, even if you could've done so without making an enemy of your friend the Khalifa. You see, it simply didn't hold water, and I was sure you were using me for some design of your own. Bucking up the morale of the darvish, as it were, wheedling me into supporting a vicious hoax."

This did make sense. He could understand Dayton's motivations, and accept them. Nevertheless, he had a queer feeling that there was something deeper. He remembered that strange look which Dayton had given him, out there on the plain beyond Khor Shambat. It had disconcerted him, it had in an odd way given him a premonition of disaster, though without any hint as to the source. For a moment he was tempted to demand an explanation. Then he shook his head as if to clear it of confusion.

"Let's drop all that, Colonel. My story seemed thin to you, and you followed a suicidal impulse, and lived through it. Now you've decided to go through with a suicidal march. That's your choice. Whatever happens between here and Suakin, that will be part of this choice."

"I accept that," Dayton answered, solemnly. "Though I am still—er, nothing at all—forward, ho! And you select 'forward,' I'm sure I couldn't."

CARVER glanced at the sun, and once more surveyed the face of the country. Old Aswad was squinting at clumps of brush as though each had a face of its own. He picked up pieces of rock, studied them, and then the horizon. There was no such thing as stating where the caravan was, simply because nothing in this waste had a name. But when master and man compared decisions, they agreed, and the caravan veered somewhat north of east. They didn't know where they were, but the very expression and flavor of the land had given the direction toward a region which they did know.

Late that day, when the sinking sun stabbed him between the shoulders like lance heads, Carver said to Dayton, "Don't know how far Osman Digna retreated. Adarama—Gros Rejeb—Asubri—el Fasher—no telling. Worst of it is, he'll have patrols at each place, guarding the water."

Carver's eyes were red. Never before had they been so deep in their sockets. The heat had fried out the cushion of fat which kept them from rattling against bone. Black scum caked his teeth, and his lips were black. The air danced, and the sky was brazen. Heat rolled in gusts. There was no more sweat in him.

Overhead, vultures wheeled. Since the sun was low, their shadows did not make blots on the caravan. But toward noon the following day, they'd furnish patches of shade, circling patches.

Now his shadow lengthened monstrously. A violet tinge danced over the ruddy earth. Asward let out a croaking yell, and levelled his extended arm.

"Over there, *sahib!* Over there, *inshallah!*"

Carver sent riders north, and others, south, to cut the trail which Asward believed they had finally reached. Somewhere, along that little used north-and-south track, there was a well.

Presently, a rifle whacked. The caravan headed toward the signal. A rider halted, held his gun over his head. The others who had gone on were racing toward him. When Carver got to

the spot, he began to probe with a spear shaft. Rock slabs, and the scanty drift of red earth cunningly hid a well. "Dig here," he directed, and watched them uncover the stone for which he had probed.

The shallow pit was barely damp. Nearby brush, greenish gray instead of dirty brown, still lived on the memory of water which had once been there. Its roots had robbed the well.

The Hadendowas looked at Carver. He nodded. They unloaded goatskin bags, and rationed a bit of hot and reeking water. Then he said to Dayton, "We know where we are, so we can tap the reserve."

"Remarkable, finding it. Quite in the clear, eh?"

CARVER pointed to bones reaching from the sand, not far from the well. "It's failed before, and you see what happens to optimists who counted on refilling here. So this trail's unpopular. All I said was, we know where we are."

"Not as refreshing as a whiskey-soda," Dayton admitted, "but helpful. Filthy country we've passed through."

"Wait till you see what's ahead," Carver promised grimly, and gave the signal to make camp.

The following morning, after a five-hour march, Carver came to the cache of water jars, deeply buried in the sand. "Won't be fun, even if each batch is complete," he told the colonel. "And if anyone's found and dipped into a station, it'll be tough."

"You don't mean you marched Negroes over country like this?"

"Couldn't afford to. Too many losses to pay off. But when a competitor tried to make trouble, and had enough men to worry us, we'd make for impassable country, live off our buried water, and shake him. Or loop back for a flank attack, and cut off his retreat. Hence the bones, here and there. Good deal more to this business than buying blacks in Omdurman, and selling 'em in Suakin."

Dayton pondered, frowningly. Finally he said, "But replenishing these'd take a special trip."

"Not necessarily. We hauled this from the Atbara River, overloaded our animals, travelled slowly. Figuring of course that we'd leave Omdurman quietly and at a time of our own picking—having a ten-hour lead, at least ten-hour—with fast pursuit over regular trails—then shaking that pursuit by heading for our water jars—then going back to regular routes."

"By Jove! Then you actually did come to get me out."

"I could have lived without taking the Khalifa that final load of cartridges. I must be an unconvincing talker."

Dayton studied awhile longer. "These chaps of yours who went into Omdurman with you, and rode out on their own, you expect them to join you?"

"Very likely. Pass right through the British column, no one'll take them for anything but 'camel Arabs.' For all we know, they may be heading up the Atbara looking for us, though they may be making directly for Suakin."

The following day, as they approached the two-mile width of brush and acacia which fringed the bank of the Atbara, Carver saw that Dayton was still wrestling with puzzles. Far from being relieved at having survived a dangerous start and having reached a stage where no more than ordinary hardship and peril prevailed, the Colonel apparently discovered new probblems. Finally Carver made a guess, though he kept it to himself: "He's busy cooking up a yarn to explain his

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RAT RACE IN RIO

By William P. McGivern

Barry Kendall was young and strong, so he didn't look the other way when a pretty girl gave him the nod for trouble

THE TROUBLE wouldn't have started if Barry Kendall had been older, or if he didn't have shoulders almost a yard wide.

He was twenty three and at that age a man doesn't look the other way when he sees a pretty girl in trouble.

However, he doesn't do anything about it, unless he feels he can. And Barry's shoulders gave him the feeling that he could stop any trouble he might start.

He was sitting in a cheap little bar in Rio, enjoying his drink, and enjoying the feeling of being on vacation, when he saw the dark, solidly built man at the adjoining table make a pass at the girl sitting beside him.

Barry watched the three with interest. What was such a pretty girl doing with such disreputable companions?

The music was low and soft, the place was filled with a collection of dock hands, cheap women and tired looking men with expressionless faces. The waiters were kept busy serving variations on the rum theme. Apparently no one else noticed.

The girl was young and pretty. She wore a white dress that made her hair look darker and her hands were slim and nervous. She looked nice and she looked scared.

There were two men with her at the table. The dark, solidly built one had a bright rose in his white suit, and a tiny, hair-line mustache. He was fat and oily, and his black eyes were little glittering buttons in rolls of flesh.

The other man was thin, and his face was set in somber, expressionless lines. His eyes were wary, and the bulge under his coat wasn't made by a prayer book.

Barry had noticed all this idly, and without any particular interest, in the time he had spent sipping his first drink. He had even heard the names of the three people, as they passed back

and forth in conversation. The fat man was Garcia; the thin man was Emanuel; the girl was Alicia.

He heard this and it didn't mean anything to him. He was too busy just feeling good. His cigarette was burning well, the drink was good, and he had three weeks in Rio before returning to the States to go back to work.

He ran a hand through his thick copper hair and tilted back his chair and smiled. Just because he felt like it.

That was when he saw the man called Garcia put his fat brown hand over the girl's. She drew hers away quickly and color mounted to her cheeks. She said something to him, which Barry couldn't hear, and he shrugged his heavy shoulders. A grin flattened his oily cheeks, and showed a set of very white, very even teeth.

The girl picked up her purse and started to rise, but he put a hand on her wrist and she sank back into her chair. She looked about nervously.

"Please," she said, "I must go now."

The fat man continued to smile. His brown fingers closed about her wrist.

"Not right away," he said.

"You're hurting me," the girl said.

That was the point where Barry interfered.

HE STOOD up and walked to the table. He ignored the men, and smiled down at the girl. "Nice to see you again, Alicia," he said. "Are you ready to go now?"

She looked up at him, startled. And then she said, "Yes, yes, I'm ready."

She started to get up, but the heavy-set man pulled her back to the chair. His fingers tightened on her arm.

"You are not quite ready," he murmured. "Send this one away."

Pain flickered in the girl's eyes. She looked up at Barry pleadingly. But she said, "I'm—I'm going to stay a while."

"I don't think so," Barry grinned. But there wasn't much humor in his smile. He glanced pointedly at Garcia's hand, which was still holding the girl's wrist. "Will you take your hand off her?" he asked.

The oily man didn't look at Barry. He said, "The girl is not going. If you are wise you will leave, my friend."

"I didn't ask you whether she was going or not," Barry said quietly. "I asked you to take your hand off her arm." His voice wasn't loud. It was almost patient. "If you don't I'll take it and feed it into your mouth."

The fat man looked at Barry then. His tiny black eyes were gleaming angrily. "You have a big American mouth," he said. "It needs attention."

He didn't nod at the thin man. He didn't give him any signal that Barry could see, but the thin man, with the somber, brooding face stood up. He was almost as tall as Barry. He moved a hand casually inside his coat and said, "You had better leave. And quickly."

His voice was just a whisper and his eyes were flat and deadly.

Barry moved fast. His left hand caught the thin man's before it came out of his coat. He tightened his grip until the thin man started to sweat.

"Better drop it," he said.

The thin man let the gun drop to the floor. His eyes were like a snake's.

"I have a long memory," he said.

"Have a seat," Barry grinned. He shoved the man down into his chair. "I should be mad at you, but I'm not. I have a kind streak in me somewhere. But don't let that make you careless."

He looked back at the man called Garcia. He just looked, but Garcia took his hand from the girl's arm.

"You are a fool," Garcia said. He said it contemptuously, but he couldn't keep the anger and humiliation out of his voice.

Barry ignored him. He smiled down at the girl.

"And now you're ready?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm ready," she said gratefully.

Barry felt someone at his back. He took a chance and looked around. A man was standing there, looking uncertainly from him to Garcia.

THIS man was big. He wore a white shirt that was probably the biggest size they had, but it still wasn't big enough. He had a shaven skull and a flat face that looked mean.

He was looking at Garcia.

"*Signor* Garcia," he said, in a surprisingly thin voice. "Is there trouble?"

The fat man felt his hair-thin mustache and his oily cheeks spread in a smile. His hand closed over the girl's arm again, and he leaned back in his chair.

"Nothing serious, Pedro," he purred. "This American has been looking at the rum too long. You understand? He needs air. It is fortunate you came along. Will you take care of him, please?"

"Si, *Signor Garcia,*" Pedro said.

His eyes came back to Barry. He didn't look worried. He inspected Barry shoulder's and chest and he still didn't look worried.

"You come along," he said, putting a hand like a ham on Barry's arm.

Barry grinned into the mean, flat eyes. The rum was making a nice warm tingle in his stomach and his hands were beginning to itch. He felt fine.

"No," he said, smiling gently. "I no come along. I no go anywhere. I 'ave date with pretty girl."

"You come along," Pedro insisted.

"You should get someone else to write your copy," Barry said "It's getting monotonous. Did you hear me, chum? I'm not coming along. I don't think you and I have much in common. We'd probably bore each other. We are not soul-mates. Scramez-vous!"

Pedro sighed and put out his other hand for Barry's shoulder.

It was all a routine to him. You hold one arm and one shoulder and turn the man around. You then shift one hand to the seat of his pants and walk the man to the door and throw him out. Then you go back to the bar and have a quiet drink.

Just routine.

But something happened this time. The shoulder wasn't there.

Barry twisted and let Pedro's hand slip past. He put the palm of his left hand under Pedro's chin, tilted it at an inviting angle, and then swung with his right.

Barry had a few accomplishments. He could light cigarettes in a high wind, he could hold his liquor and he had a right hand that could hit with the kick of a mule.

Pedro took the punch with a surprised look. He went backward and sat down about eight feet away. He blinked foolishly and then slowly climbed to his feet. He didn't look mad. He just looked surprised and vaguely annoyed. He walked toward Barry again, with his cropped head pulled into his immense shoulders.

Barry heard something behind him and wheeled. The thin man was scrambling on the floor for his gun. Barry stepped on his wrist and then slapped him across the face.

The girl was staring at him, lips parted.

"Get moving," Barry snapped.

He swung around just in time to see a huge fist coming for his face. He ducked and let it slip past his head. He pounded Pedro's belly twice, and it sounded like he was thumping a wine barrel.

Pedro grunted and tried to wrap his

arms around Barry's neck. He didn't quite make it. Barry twisted free and let his right go again. He put everything he had into it this time.

Pedro went down again. And this time he was hurt. He rolled slowly to one side and grunted painfully as he started to crawl to his feet. Blood was coming from his mouth. But it didn't occur to him to quit. He continued the laborious process of hauling himself to his feet.

Barry turned back to the table. The fat man called Garcia was trying to crawl under his chair. Barry kicked his plump posterior to help him along; then he scooped up the girl's purse in one hand and grabbed her elbow with the other.

The cafe was in a mild uproar. Everyone was standing, but they cleared out of the way as Barry made for the door. He dragged the girl through the grass mat doors and turned right. The street was dark.

HE SHIFTED the girl's purse to his other hand and he noticed that he had picked up an envelope from the table. The purse had evidently been lying on the envelope and he scooped them both up together. He put the envelope in his coat pocket and stuck the girl's purse under his arm.

"We'd better lose ourselves," he said.

"I don't think they'll follow us," she answered.

"Let's make sure."

They walked quickly through the dark, twisting streets, without talking. After half a dozen turns he decided no one was following them.

He stopped under a faint street lamp and looked down at the girl.

She was breathing heavily and she still looked frightened. He noticed that her eyes were very dark and clear and that her lips were very red. He liked the way she looked. But he didn't like the fear in her eyes.

He handed her the purse.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you for everything. I must go on alone now. I live near here. You have caused yourself enough trouble."

"It was a pleasure," he grinned. "Can't I take you home?"

"It won't be necessary," she said. "You would get yourself in more trouble. Forget that you met me tonight. I appreciate what you did, but you mustn't do any more."

"Don't be worrying about me," he protested. "You're the one that's in trouble. Would you have a drink with me somewhere? Maybe if you told me what's wrong I might be able to help. At least you could get it off your chest. And I've got two perfectly good shoulders you can cry on."

She glanced at his shoulders and smiled. A faint little smile but it made him feel better.

"You have nice shoulders," she said, as if it were important. "But they wouldn't be enough. I must leave you now. Please do not say any more."

He shrugged. "If that's the way you want it."

"That's the way it must be," she said.

She put her hand lightly on his arm for a minute, and then she turned and walked quickly away. He watched her slender figure until it disappeared in the gloomy depths of the street.

HE TURNED slowly and started walking aimlessly. He didn't feel quite as good as he had at the start of the evening. He didn't know how to describe the way he felt. But it wasn't good.

He felt in a pocket for his cigarettes and his fingers touched the envelope he had picked up in the cafe. He crossed the street and stepped into the

feeble circle of radiance created by a street lamp, and examined it.

It was about eight inches long and three inches wide, sealed and unaddressed. The contents, judging from the weight of the envelope, were rather bulky.

He wondered about it as he continued walking. It might have belonged to the girl or it might have belonged to the men. He wasn't sure what to do with it, but he decided to make sure it was safe until someone came forward to claim it.

When he reached the business district of Rio, he turned into an all night drug-store. He addressed the envelope to himself at his hotel, put a stamp on it and dropped it in the wicker mail box that hung in front of the candy counter.

It was nine o'clock then. He debated whether to go back to his hotel or to have another drink. The drink seemed like a better idea, so he turned into the first cafe he came to.

But after the first drink he felt bored. He found himself thinking about the dark haired girl and wondering how she had become mixed up with the fat man called Garcia, and the thin man called Emanuel. They just didn't go together.

He finished his drink and went outside. Rio is a wonderful place if you know what you want. You can find it easily and pleasantly.

But when you don't know what you want it's no more satisfactory than any place in the world.

And Barry didn't know what he wanted.

He walked awhile, not particularly interested in the prospects of returning to his hotel room. The streets were becoming quiet now, for Rio goes to bed early. There were a few girls on the streets selling flowers. They also had other things to sell but Barry wasn't interested.

An hour later he was down in one of the dark, unsavoury neighborhoods of Rio, where anything can happen and the infrequent police patrol their beats arm-in-arm.

He turned into a dark lane and the only sound was his own slow footsteps. The street was deserted. He stopped to light a cigarette and the briefly flaring match threw his shadow against the street.

He looked at his shadow and then his muscles tensed.

There was another shadow beside it.

He dropped the match and both shadows disappeared as the night closed in with an almost physical impact.

He wheeled quickly, but not quickly enough.

The blow caught him at the temple. He lashed out blindly and he heard a grunt as his fist struck yielding flesh. Then another blow landed and the lights came on, brilliant and blinding.

But the lights were inside his head, and when they went out the blackness that came was blacker than anything he had ever known.

It was deep and endless and strangely comfortable. He snuggled into it and went to sleep.

HE CAME around slowly. The first thing he felt was the ground against his cheek and he knew he was lying on his face. That puzzled him. His head ached and his stomach was full of butterflies.

He tried opening his eyes. They opened. Good. That's one for our side. He couldn't see anything. It was darker than a coal pile covered with black velvet.

Getting up was tougher. His legs just didn't want to work. He swore at them and made them play ball. The knees straightened out and he was

standing, wobbling a little from side to side.

His head ached and when he put his hand there he felt sticky blood.

He remembered getting hit on the head. His hand went automatically to his wallet. It was still there. He still had his cigarettes, his keys, his money, his matches. All present and accounted for.

The luminous dial of his watch said one o'clock. He put his ear to it and found it was still ticking. One o'clock! In the morning? Probably. It wasn't this dark in the afternoon. That careful use of logic made him feel better. He felt smart and capable. About as smart as a two-year old and as capable as a dipsomaniac in the last stages.

He decided to go to his hotel room and lie down. He wanted to lie back down in the streets but he knew there was probably some regulation gainst it. He didn't want to break any regulations. Not in this law-abiding city, where every tourist was guaranteed protection from everything but knives, bullets and hand grenades.

He went to his hotel room.

The room clerk clucked sympathetically when he saw Barry's condition.

"*Signor* has been in trouble?"

"Of course not," Barry muttered. "*Signor* is hokey-doke. No trouble. I cut myself shaving."

The little clerk's eyes got round and he said, "Oh!" in an understanding voice. "Your friends could not wait," he said, irrelevantly.

"Friends?" Barry said. "The word sounds familiar. What about them?"

"Two friends," the clerk said. "They come several hours ago. They wait for you in your room. But they come back down in little while. Could not wait. Very sorry."

"I can imagine," Barry said.

He crossed the lobby in swift strides and took the elevator to his floor. His room was still locked. He opened the door carefully and snapped on the light.

SOMEONE had done a very thorough job. The contents of the drawers were spilled on the floor, the suitcases had been opened and the bed looked like two boisterous kids had staged an all-night pillow fight there.

Barry closed and locked the door. He didn't know what to do so he made a drink and sat down with a cigarette. The drink helped his head a little. When he finished the drink he took a long shower, put a bandage on his temple and sat down again in a pair of shorts.

He made another drink and lit another cigarette. Thinking wasn't easy. He didn't know what to think about and his thinking apparatus wasn't in the best of shape. He'd be thinking along when the gears would slip and he'd find himself worrying about a dark-haired girl with frightened eyes.

That got him nowhere.

He wasn't a dumb person. Someone was looking for something they had reason to believe he had. They had hit him over the head to find it and then they had ransacked his hotel room. The only thing which had come into his possession recently was the manila envelope, which he had picked up at the cafe.

So, by a process of elimination, that was what they were after. Why? He didn't know.

But it seemed safe to suppose that the girl was mixed up in things somewhere. So the best thing to do would be to try and find her. That was not only the best thing, but it was something he wanted to do. If there were no logical reasons for trying to find her he could have invented some.

Feeling quite clever about that he

poured another drink and took a nap.

He woke up about four hours later, feeling fairly good. His head still ached a little, but that might have been the drinks. He shaved, dressed and was out on the streets before the sun, the beautiful sun of the travel posters, had started to work.

It was only five o'clock. It would be dark for another three hours, but some of the shops were already open, trying to get in a few hours, before the sun closed up everything.

There were not many people on the streets.

He walked quickly, trying to retrace his steps of a few hours before. He found the cafe in which the trouble started, and he remembered he'd taken a right from there.

The turns he had made with the girl were fairly easy to follow. He kept going, guessing occasionally, until he knew he had been lucky. He came to the street lamp where the girl had left him.

She had said she lived a short distance from there, but he had no assurance that she had been telling him the truth. He just hoped.

HE CONTINUED walking until he came to a dry cleaning shop. Such establishments were not common in the cheaper neighborhoods. In the large hotel areas where there was plenty of tourist business you could find four or five in a block. But they were very scarce in the outlying neighborhoods, for the basic South American costume didn't need cleaning often, and most of the people couldn't afford it when they did.

The girl, he remembered, had been wearing a white suit, and that was an item that would have to be dry-cleaned.

He turned into the shop. The proprietor was ironing by the light of a small kerosene lamp. He looked up and nodded at Barry.

"I'm looking for a girl," Barry said. "About this tall," he continued, holding his hand at the level of his shoulder, "and quite slim. She has dark hair and she's very pretty. Do you know her?"

The shop-owner was a tired little man who looked as if he worked hard for his money. He had lost interest from Barry's first sentence, and he went back to his ironing with a gloomy shake of his head.

"Don't know any girl these," he muttered. "Don't look at girls anymore. Too much work. Too much wife."

In spite of his aching head, Barry smiled.

"It's a tough life," he said. "Are you the only shop in the neighborhood?"

The little man nodded. "Only shop for many miles. Everybody come here. Too much work."

"Yeah, I know," Barry said. "Well you should know this girl then. She wears white suits. She probably brings them in here. She has very white skin. And deep dark eyes. You must have seen her."

The little man paused and Barry saw a new glint in his eyes. But he went back to the ironing with renewed vigor, as if he regretted the time he was wasting.

"Very sorry," he said. "Too much work. Very little money. No time to look at pretty girls."

Barry took out his wallet. He put two bills on the counter.

The iron stopped. The little tailor wet his lips.

"Do you know her?"

"Maybe I see her one time."

"Her name is Alicia, I think."

"Ah, Alicia! Why you didn't say?" The little tailor was almost cheerful

now. He moved closer to the counter and peered at the two bills.

"Where does she live?" Barry asked.

The tailor scratched his head. "I am not so sure that—"

"Quit stalling," Barry snapped. He tossed another bill on the counter. "Where does she live?"

The tailor couldn't take his eyes from the money. It seemed to fascinate him. "It is not far," he said. "Two blocks from here. On Avenue Maria. Number ten. You will find it very easily, *signor*."

"I'd better," Barry said. "Or I'll come back here and tell your wife you're pretty fast with the addresses of all the local beauties."

THE tailor's moan was in his ears as he strode out of the shop and down the street. He was hurrying now. Two blocks passed and he made a right on the Avenue Maria. Number ten was a single-storied building, made of white lime-stone, with heavy oak windows and doors.

There was a small, well-kept garden in front of the house. Its flowers filled the air with a heavy fragrance.

His steps sounded loud on the stone pathway.

He banged unceremoniously at the door. There was no sound from within the house. The entire street seemed dead. He banged again with no better results.

He reached for the ornate doorknob. It turned under his hand. He knew he might be making a fool of himself, but he pushed the door open and walked in.

He had to strike a match to see where he was going. He was in a small hallway. He caught his reflection from a large mirror on the wall. There were several pictures, a colorful carpet runner, and an arched doorway leading to another room.

The match went out and he struck another and walked through the arched doorway. His eyes had trouble focusing for a moment.

When they did he felt the hair at the back of his neck starting to crawl.

There was a body sprawled on the floor. The body of a slim, elderly man. Barry knew he was dead even before he noticed the knife protruding from his back. There was the look of death in the careless, undignified sprawl of the body.

He struck another match and from it lit a candle that was on a small table. The additional illumination didn't tell him anything.

He heard a moan then, a soft, piteous moan, that seemed to come from an adjoining room.

He picked up the candle and walked toward the sound.

The woman was lying on the floor, blood welling from a deep cut on her forehead. She was moaning softly, inarticulately. She was middle-aged, with black hair and tanned skin. She was wearing a loose night dress, and her bare feet were encased in straw slippers.

Barry knelt beside her and supported her head on his arm. Her eyes opened slowly.

"You must hurry," she whispered. "There is no time." Fright came into her eyes and she struggled weakly against him. "Who are you?"

"A friend," Barry said. "Where is Alicia?"

"They have taken her. They killed the master and left me for dead. Alicia they took with them. You must help. You must hurry."

"Where did they take her?"

"I heard them talking. They were going to the beach of the Ascension. It is not far. Their boat is there. You must hurry. They are evil men."

Barry didn't waste any more time talking. He picked up the woman and made her as comfortable as possible on a couch in the room.

OUTSIDE he stopped the first native he met, gave him a dollar and told him to get a doctor to the house as fast as possible. Then he looked for a cab.

That was almost an impossibility in that area of Rio at that time of the morning. He walked blocks and he was almost back to the hotel area before he located a cruiser.

The driver was typical of all Rio cabbies. He was not anxious to go anywhere. He would rather cruise about by himself and meditate on the foolishness of human endeavor.

He knew where Ascension beach was but didn't like the scenery on the way there. He would rather drive North if it was all the same to the *Signor*.

Barry put a hand on the driver's shoulder and squeezed lightly. "Ascension beach," he said.

The driver looked at the massive hand and shrugged with his free shoulder. Resistance was pointless. Who cared to resist, anyway?

"But of course, *Signor*," he murmured courteously.

The ride was short and fast. The driver drove as if he had a date with destiny and didn't want to be late. The city dropped behind them, and after a twenty-minute ride along a curving beach road he pulled in beside a clump of trees and stopped.

"Ascension beach," he said.

Barry paid him and got out. The driver put his car in gear and drove away.

Ascension beach was a narrow strip of white sand, gleaming palely now in the fading moonlight. The ocean stretched away in silver smoothness. The strip was deserted and the only sound was made by the fragrant wind whispering through the palm fronds under which Barry stood.

About three hundred yards offshore a sloop was anchored. Moonlight made a silver cord of the hauser that trailed into the water from its stern. There was no sign of life aboard, no lights. Just its gentle pitch and sway to indicate that it was not a mirage created by the moon and the water.

The old woman had said Ascension beach. And she said the men had taken Alicia here to meet their boat. This was the beach. That was the boat.

That was the way Barry reasoned.

He kicked off his shoes and dropped his coat and shirt beside him, and wearing nothing but his thin trousers he walked down to the water and waded out until he could begin swimming.

The water was warm and smooth. He had swum the mile in college but that had been several years before. When he reached what he guessed to be the halfway mark he was blowing.

He floated awhile and then turned over and went back to his smooth, powerful crawl.

There was no lookout on deck. Or if there was he was asleep. Barry caught hold of the hauser at the stern of the sloop and drifted there a moment until his breathing slowed down. Then he pulled himself up to the deck.

HE GOT both his hands on the rail and with one powerful heave cleared it and dropped to the deck. He crouched there, listening.

He could hear nothing but the sigh of the wind and gentle slap of the waves against the sides.

Finally he rose to his feet and started quietly toward the companionway of the cabin.

He had covered half the distance when a bright light struck him in the

face. Another flashed on behind him, spraying him with its brilliance.

A voice said, "The American with the large mouth. What a pleasant surprise!"

Feet scraped the deck behind him and something cold and hard punched into his back.

"I didn't know you were expecting me," Barry said. "Nice of you to go to all that trouble."

"Don't mention it, please."

The gun prodded his back. "Go down the steps."

He went down the steps. A door opened to the right, throwing an oblong of light across the stairs. A huge figure stood in the doorway.

The gun pushed Barry again and he moved toward the door. The big man stepped aside and Barry entered a small cabin, lined with four bunks. There was a table with some greasy cards and a bottle on it, and two stools to one side.

On one of the stools sat the girl. She was wearing dark slacks and a sweater. She looked at him with wide, expressionless eyes and said nothing.

The door closed and Barry looked around.

There were three men in the room. Garcia, Emanuel and Pedro. The fat man, the thin man, and the big man. Garcia's face was wreathed in an oily smile. The thin man looked gloomy and mean. Pedro looked blank.

Emanuel and Garcia held guns.

"Nice of you to save us the trouble of going after you," Garcia said. "You have a proverb in your country about attracting flies with honey." He bowed slightly to the girl. "We put it to test and find it works quite well."

"Ling Po, I presume," Barry said.

"You have caused us a lot of trouble," Garcia sighed. "You can make amends to some extent by telling us where the envelope is now."

"Envelope?" Barry grinned. "Velly solly. No got."

"We know you have it," Garcia said. "The envelope is quite important. It contains the necessary bills of lading and harbor permits for us to unload our supplies. The bills are forgeries but they are quite efficient. Our supplies are of such a nature that we have to use forged harbor permits. You see this ship is actually a man-of-war. It contains the ammunition my employers need. They need it badly and they need it now. Because of your very stupid intervention we are forced to take a long chance and unload our cargo on Ascension beach. We can't wait to recover the forged permits which Alicia so kindly procured for us."

BARRY looked down at the girl, but she avoided his eyes.

"We want the envelope," Garcia said, "just so it won't turn up somewhere and cause a lot of awkward questions. You understand, of course?"

"Sure, but I haven't got it," Barry said. He shrugged cheerfully. "Now what are you going to do?"

"Teach you the virtue of minding your own business, if nothing more," Garcia grinned.

He nodded once and Pedro moved. He hit Barry at the base of the neck with a fist like a maul. Barry took a long time falling. He seemed to be falling forever. Falling headfirst into a pool of smothering velvet. He never did hit bottom.

When he came to his head was aching and he knew something was wrong. He couldn't move hand or foot. He tried hard and couldn't. So he stopped trying. By craning his neck he saw the reason.

His wrists and ankles had been

lashed to the four corners of the cot he was lying on, and someone had done a pretty good job.

He yelled, "Fire," experimentally. He couldn't think of anything else to do.

The door opened almost immediately. Emanuel, the thin man, came in and sat down on the edge of the bunk. A nickel-plated gun hung loosely in his hand.

"You're making a lot of noise," he said, almost pleasantly.

"What am I supposed to do, count sheep?" Barry snarled.

The thin, somber face parted in a rare grin. "You slapped me last night," he said, "that was a mistake. You are making too much noise. That is another mistake."

He raised the gun and slapped Barry across the face. He did it almost carelessly. It wasn't hard enough to knock him out or break his jaw. It just took about two inches of skin off his cheek and loosened his back teeth.

"Are you going to make more noise?" he said.

Barry had trouble talking. His jaw felt numb. But he managed to say, "I guess not." That seemed a smart thing to say.

"Good."

Emanuel got up and left the room.

Barry lay still for a few minutes, waiting for his jaw to stop aching. It wasn't going to, so he went to work on the ropes anyway. He was mad now, but that didn't help him any. He wondered where the girl figured in and that didn't help any, either.

Fifteen minutes later he stopped working to catch his breath. His right hand was almost free but the skin was gone from the wrist and he could hear the blood hitting the floor in little drips. It hurt but he didn't bother thinking about it. He went back to work again and five minutes later one hand was free.

For another five minutes he tried to untie his other hand but it was no good. His fingers were numb and untying knots with one hand isn't easy.

HE LAY back and thought a while. There was only one thing to do, a long chance, but he had to take it. He put his free hand back where it had been tied and drew a deep breath.

"Fire! he yelled. "Police!"

Emanuel came in again and this time he had a piece of cloth and a rope in his hand. He sat down beside Barry.

"The mouth needs attention," he said.

"Go to hell," Barry yelled.

Emanuel hit him again, this time on the other side of the face.

Barry closed his mouth.

Emanuel put the cloth over his mouth and bent forward to tie it in place. He was too busy to notice anything else.

Barry moved his right hand slowly. He brought it down beside the bed and then up again until it was behind Emanuel's thin neck.

Then he grabbed that thin neck and pushed Emanuel's face into his breast. He closed his eyes and squeezed with all his strength.

Emanuel made gasping noises. He tried to get to his feet but Barry's hand held his neck in a crushing grip. For a minute the struggle lasted. Barry felt his strength fading. The sweat was pouring into his eyes. With his last bit of strength he shook Emanuel and he was rewarded by hearing something crack under his fingers.

Emanuel stopped fighting then. Barry lay still, gasping for breath. A few minutes later he was able to go through the thin man's clothes. He found a knife . . .

BARRY paused outside the door just long enough to hear voices, then he kicked it open.

Garcia looked at him for a stunned instant and the smile slid off his oily cheeks.

"You—you," he whispered. "Emanuel was—"

"I just broke his neck," Barry said tiredly, and he realized he sounded ridiculous.

Pedro was sitting opposite Garcia, stolidly unmoved by Barry's appearance. The girl had been lying in one of the bunks, but now she had swung her legs over the side, and was watching him tensely.

Barry looked at her and grinned. "Where do you fit into this?" he asked.

Garcia saw his chance and took it. He grabbed for his gun and swung it to cover Barry. But he didn't quite make it.

Barry's gun kicked twice and Garcia's foolish smile disappeared forever. He looked at the spreading stains on his shirt almost sorrowfully, and then he slumped slowly to the floor.

Barry watched Pedro.

"You feel heroic?" he asked.

Pedro shrugged his massive shoulders and yawned. It was clear that he considered the party over. "Feel hungry," he said.

The girl came to Barry's side. She put a hand on his arm, just as she had the night before. "I told you to stay out of this," she said.

"Out of what?" Barry asked. "I am the original know-nothing man. I get my head beat in, I shoot people, I go swimming in the morning, and I don't know why. I'm waiting to hear."

"My father was a harbor official," the girl said. "Garcia wanted him to prepare the forms so he could bring this ammunition through the docks. Father said no, and then Garcia came to me. He threatened to kill my father unless I got the forms for him. I was foolish, I suppose, but I did it. I brought them to him in the little cafe last night. They were in the envelope."

"Was that your father at number ten, Avenue Maria?" Barry asked. He tried to make his voice gentle. But it just sounded tired.

"Yes," she said in a whisper. "Garcia killed him this morning."

"And the woman?"

"Our housekeeper. Is she all right?"

"I think so," Barry said. He looked at Pedro. "If you're hungry, start cooking. Cook enough for three."

Pedro nodded and started to work. His code was very simple. If you had the gun you gave the orders. If the other man had the gun he gave the orders. Very simple and uncomplicated.

Barry looked down at the girl and he thought again how nice she looked. He wondered how she'd like American clothes.

He would ask her after breakfast.

★ NEW FLYING BOAT ★

THE U. S. Patent Office has issued patent number 2,259,625 to Claude Dornier, a famous German airplane expert, on his latest type of flying boat that can make a forced landing on a rough sea without capsizing.

The bottom of the boat is shaped like a curved V which is very similar to many motor boat designs. In addition, the body widens out just above the water line and then tapers back in so that a bulge is formed on both sides of the fuselage rather than on one side.

The inventor says that his design is more buoyant than present models and cannot roll from side to side. Thus he can do away with floats that are attached under the wings or just out from the body, increasing the air resistance and water resistance problems peculiar to the present day flying boats.

JUNGLE NAPOLEON

By DWIGHT V. SWAIN

HE WAS a shy little man with thinning sandy hair, pale eyebrows, and a surface air of perpetual meekness. Standing less than five-and-a-half feet tall with his boots on, he never tipped the scales at more than 130 pounds. To his dying day he neither smoked nor drank, and he frowned severely on the man who swore in his presence. Casual observers described him as insignificant. During his boyhood, it was taken for granted he would one day enter the ministry.

But he dreamed, instead, of tropical empires to the south. Dreamed, until the hidden spark within him lit fires behind his cold grey eyes to flame around the world and muster him the tattered battalion of incredible fighting men who made him president of two countries and carved him a bloody niche in war's hall of fame. Dreamed, and came so close to achieving reality that it took the combined resources of five Central American nations, the governments of the U. S. and Great Britain, and the ruthless hatred of his arch-enemy, Cornelius Vanderbilt, to put 36-year-old William Walker—doctor, lawyer, newspaperman, and adventurer extraordinary—in front of the Honduran firing squad that executed him at Trujillo on September 12, 1860.

That Walker lived and died as he did is one of history's paradoxes. Certainly his upbringing held no promise that his name was one day to be worth a thousand regulars, or that his fanatical ambition and insatiate lust for power were for five years to drench Latin America in blood from Colombia to Mexico.

Son of a Scotch banker of Nashville, Tennessee, young William's birth on May 8, 1824, created no particular stir. His childhood and youth apparently were characterized chiefly for their uneventfulness. A puny, studious lad in a period when brawn and vigor were the order of the day, he kept to himself most of the time and made few friends. He was considered a model son.

Setting out to become a doctor, he graduated from the University of Nashville and the University of Pennsylvania, later devoting two years to European study and travel. Then, although a qualified physician, he decided against practicing medicine and took up law, moving to New Orleans. His reticence and inability to make friends brought him failure as an attorney, however, so he got a job on the New Orleans *Crescent* and soon became a capable newspaperman.

It was while in Louisiana that he met Helen Martin, a deaf-mute, the only woman with whom his name was ever linked. The romance, if romance it was, was cut short by Miss Martin's death in a yellow fever epidemic. A favorite tale has it that he never smiled again, and attributes his recklessness to this bereavement. At any rate, young Walker soon tired of Louisiana and headed west on the heels of the forty-niners. 1850 found him working on a San Francisco newspaper.

Here his dream of empire first came to the fore. Mexico was in a troublous state and a number of adventurers had tried—and failed—to seize Sonora and other outlying territories to establish law, order, and looting privileges.

Undaunted by their lack of success, Walker conceived the idea of invading *California Baja,* that long Mexican peninsula extending south from our own state of California. Landing at La Paz,

(Continued on page 174)

"Senor, you are not going to Spain!"

ASSIGNMENT BARCELONA

By H. B. Hickey

It's hard to say no when you are told to do something under the threat of a gun in your guts—but Steve gave the wrong answer anyway

STEVE FARREL looked into the future and all he could see was a long black box. And the man inside the box was himself. It wasn't a pleasant vision.

"Why don't you point that gun in some other direction?" he asked as mildly as possible. His back was beginning to ache from being pressed against the wall of the fishing shack.

"Because if I do, then you will take it away from me. You might even shoot me with it. Then how could I prevent you from going to Spain?"

I wish he wouldn't take everything I say so literally, Steve thought. "Why the devil should I want to go to Spain?" he asked aloud.

The dark little man with the gun gave Farrel an oily smile. "Why not, señor? Spain is a lovely country."

Suddenly Steve was fed up to the ears. "To hell with you and to hell with your double-talk!" he blurted. "I've told you I'm in St. Laurent for some fishing and to paint. And I'm not going to Spain!"

"Just what I said, señor. You are not going to Spain." The brim of the little man's white hat was too short to shade his eyes and Steve could see the shine come over them. "Please turn around and put your hands as high on the wall as you can reach."

Steve did as he was told but he didn't want to. Inside himself his guts were tightening into knots and the skin on the back of his neck felt cold and tightly drawn. What a way to die, he was thinking, with his nose against a fish-stinking shack on a lonely Mediterranean beach. His back muscles bunched and he sucked in a breath that burned his parched throat. Now!

But it wasn't a bullet that hit him, it was the barrel of the gun. It hit him just behind the ear and knocked his face into the dirty boards and made him weak enough so that he fell to his knees in the sand. It was an expert blow, not quite hard enough to knock him out.

Then an equally expert kick caught him directly under his lowest right rib and the sharp pain brought him back to full consciousness. He saw the small

dark figure as it turned him around but the face was only a blur.

"Now you have just the strength to stand again," the low, faraway voice said.

The voice was right. Steve found that by leaning against the shack he was able to keep his feet. But inside he was sick, and weak as a baby.

"It was much worse for the one who came before you," the dark man told him. "It can get to be very much worse for you, too, if you don't talk."

The voice was closer now and the face was becoming distinct. Steve saw that the dark eyes were still glazed, but now they had an eagerness, and the thin smile that curled around bloodless lips was expectant.

A sickening realization came to Farrel. The little man didn't want him to talk! He wanted Steve to refuse so he could hit him again! The thought made him nauseated so that he had to fight to get his own voice back.

"What do you want to know?" he managed to gasp.

There was a trace of disappointment in the other's tone. "We want to know whom you are supposed to meet in Spain. And what you are to get from him. That is all."

That is all. But it wasn't enough. There had to be more, because the longer Steve talked the longer he would remain alive. And if he remained alive long enough, maybe Velasquez would come back from town.

EVEN as that thought came to him Steve Farrel looked over the small man's shoulder and saw a short, husky figure come around the edge of a small dune in the gathering dusk. Water slapping against the piles of the dilapidated pier that was just beyond the shack made a sound which covered the approach of the rope soled shoes in the sand.

"It's like this," Farrel said desperately. "I was to get a boat here that would take me to a town near Barcelona. There I would meet a man named Orlando."

"You're lying," the small man said. "Orlando was the name of the American who came before you."

His foot shot out to crack against Steve's shin. A few inches higher and it would have broken the kneecap. As the American sank to the sand again he saw the gun swing up over his head . . .

Steve's side felt almost the way it had when he'd had his appendicitis attack, and his headache combined with the rocking of the boat to make him sick. Afterwards he felt better and when he came on deck the cool breeze revived him further. He saw Velasquez standing over a huddled shape.

The husky Basque grinned at Steve. "So you finally came around," he said in his thick voice. "Madre de Dios, that last step was a long one! I thought I would never make it in time."

"How long was I unconscious?" Steve asked.

"About two hours, señor."

"And how is it with him?" Steve asked pointing to the man on the deck.

Veslasquez shrugged. "I think I broke some ribs. What matter? As soon as I can tie some weights to him . . ."

"No!" said Steve. He was shocked at the coldness of it. "It isn't necessary to kill him!"

"That's where you are wrong, amigo. That is the most necessary thing of all. If you don't want to see it you can go back into the wheelhouse."

Later, when the Basque came into the wheelhouse, Steve stared up at him questioningly. The husky man nodded and ran a thick hand through his

coarse, close-cropped hair.

"Well, what else should I have done? If we let him go he would have sent a warning ahead. And if not, where could I keep him? The other side has all the jails, you know." He hesitated. "Besides, that makes one less of them."

"I suppose so," said Steve. "I'd better get used to playing with new rules."

"Without rules, you mean. What do you think they did to the other American?"

"Why talk about that? After six months it's plain something happened to him."

"Something also happened to two of our best men," Velasquez said bitterly. "We are jeopardizing an organization which has taken years to build. And for what? Because someone has said, 'An American is coming after important papers. Help him.' "

Steve shrugged. "I still don't see why the whole thing couldn't have been handled through our embassy."

Velasquez looked as though he couldn't believe his ears. "Don't you know that your embassy is watched day and night? Don't you have any idea of what it's like in a fascist State? How did they ever happen to pick you for this job?"

"They picked me because I can pass for a Spaniard, even though it was only my mother who was Spanish; because I speak the language like a native; and because I'm not a regular Department man and not likely to be known."

"I can see the advantage of that. Also the disadvantage. Well, we shall try to keep our eyes on you. It won't be like it was with the first American."

Steve was beginning to have his doubts. "Won't it?"

"I hope not."

IT WAS almost dawn when Steve landed on the beach between Mataro and Badalona, just north of Barcelona. In the half-light he could see the dark shapes of the scattered houses in the fishermen's village, and he knew that the one farthest from the water and second from the south would be the one he wanted.

His knock was answered by a tall, white haired man with a seamed, dark face and tired, but gentle eyes. The Spaniard looked at him expectantly.

"Some information about the fishing here," Steve requested.

"Good or bad, depending on where you have fished before."

"Most recently at St. Laurent. A man named Velasquez told me it would be warmer here."

"He was right." The old man drew Steve into the bare shack and lit a kerosene lamp. In the light the American could see that the eyes were not so tired now.

The white haired man began to talk rapidly, in a pure Castilian accent. Steve wondered what the man had been before the civil war. Maybe a professor in the University at Madrid.

"You will go to Barcelona," the old man was saying. "There is a cafe there. It is called 'Tio Malo,' the 'Bad Uncle,' and in that cafe you will be met by a man named Lopez, who will direct you further."

Steve was startled. "A devil of a way to do things! Why could it not have been here?"

"I don't know. It is better if we don't know too much, each of us. Then we can't ever tell much."

"All right. How am I going to know this Lopez?"

"Do you know de Alarcon's book, 'El sombrero de tres picos'?"

" 'The Three Cornered Hat'. Yes."

"Buy a copy and read it while you sip some wine at Tio Malo's. Lopez will make himself known to you."

"And how am I going to get to Barcelona?"

"A truck goes through here every morning, just after dawn. The driver is not one of us but he is obliging, and he will drive you to the city."

The truck turned out to be an ancient affair, driven by a man who would have looked more at home on a donkey. He was pleasant enough but his vocabulary seemed to consist of obscene words. By the time they had passed through Badalona Steve had caught the hang of it and could tell by the inflection whether the same word meant that the driver was pleased or whether he was angry.

About thirty miles out of Barcelona they pulled over to the side of the road and the driver brought out a sandwich wrapped in dirty paper. He handed half to Steve and when they had finished eating he produced a small skin of wine. The cheese in the sandwich smelled and tasted sour, but the wine was cool and refreshing.

"Do you know a cafe called Tio Malo?" Steve asked as they got under way again.

"Yes. Almost as bad as Tio Bueno."

"'The Good Uncle'?"

"Yes. They had a wealthy nephew, it is said. Rumor has it that they turned him in to the fascisti for his money. The good uncle is the one who was sorry afterward."

"But the place itself?"

"On the waterfront. A gathering for smugglers."

Suddenly, from up ahead, there was the sound of sirens and a moment later a similar sound came from behind them. They were trapped, caught right in the middle! But Steve saw a chance.

"Keep going!" he yelled to the driver. Before the words were out of his mouth Steve was on the running board. The road was straight at this point, just wide enough for two cars, and flanked by a strip of sandy soil. Steve hoped it was as soft as it looked.

HE HIT the road as though he were getting off a street car and let the momentum of the truck throw him forward and out onto the strip of soil. It wasn't as soft as Steve had hoped, but not hard, either, and he landed on the back of his neck, rolled over, and came up running.

Here the land was flat, sloping upward from the sea, but there was a row of trees on the left which offered cover. Steve made it before the first motorcycle came into sight. He started forward in the direction they'd been traveling, realized it was just what he'd be expected to do, and doubled back.

As he ran, Steve counted five motorcycles and two cars. If there were that many coming from the other direction it meant there would be at least thirty men after him soon. His chances seemed slim.

A moment later there was the sound of gunfire and Steve knew they'd caught up with the truck. And there could not have been time for them to question the driver; they must have shot him on sight. The American felt a wave of hot anger pour over him.

His mind was going in high gear as he came around a bend. If he stuck to the countryside it would just be a question of time until the dragnet hauled him in. His only chance was to slip past them on the road; they'd never expect him to try that. Steve headed back to the highway.

Here it was nice and straight and he could see a long way. Toward Badalona there was a cloud of dust and it was coming his way, coming fast. Steve took off his coat and got into the middle of the road.

The car was a big one, a long, low slung Isotta roadster that could do a

hundred miles an hour in second. At the wheel was a man and beside him a girl. Steve waved his coat desperately and the car squealed to a halt. He put his coat back on and walked toward it.

"Señor," he began haltingly. His hand dropped into his pocket and made a bulge there.

"What is it?" the man at the wheel asked imperiously. He was tall and thin with a wisp of a mustache under his long, straight nose and his hair was black as coal. For a while Steve wasn't paying any attention to the girl.

"I am going to Barcelona," Steve told him.

"The devil! I thought there was something wrong with the road, perhaps." His black eyes were haughty. "Get out of my way or I'll run you down."

The bulge in Steve's pocket waved toward the driver. "Don't try it. I'd as soon shoot you as not."

The car stayed where it was and Steve went around the side and climbed in beside the girl. She moved away from him as though he were a leper and for the first time he took a good look at her.

SHE was something to see, all right. Her hair was as black as the driver's and it hung in soft waves around a cameo face. A light sport coat was open to reveal a white dress and a figure which filled it to perfection. Steve looked for a wedding ring but her fingers were bare of jewelry.

"I regret this imposition, señorita," Steve told her. "But the road ahead is full of police who are looking for me."

"With good reason, no doubt," she snapped.

"Don't talk to the dog!" the driver told her. "We may be forced to endure his company but we don't have to engage in conversation with him!"

"Wrong again," Steve grinned. "You are going to act very friendly. My name, if you've forgotten, is Phillip Seville. Now be so kind as to tell me yours."

It was the girl who answered. "Very well, if we must. I am Marina Sanroma and this is Don Ramon Alvarez de la Vega."

Steve talked fast. At the rate they were travelling it would take no more than five minutes to reach the truck. "I shall address you as Marina and Ramon. And listen here, Ramon: if we're stopped I don't want you to be too obliging. Be yourself, act nasty."

He felt the girl tense beside him and he could tell she was suppressing a chuckle. Don Ramon's face paled with anger.

"But the police will recognize you, will they not?" the girl asked.

"I doubt it," Steve told her. "And please don't make any false moves. I'd really hate to shoot you."

There was something in the way he said it that made her look at him and he saw with surprise that her eyes were a deep blue, not black as he'd expected. Her voice was low and clear, beautifully modulated.

She started to say something but Ramon cut her off. "I told you not to speak to him!"

Marina didn't like that one bit. It was plain from the way her chin went up that she wasn't taking orders from Don Ramon or anyone else. But before she could reply they were bearing down on a group of uniformed men who stood around a car which blocked the road.

As the Isotta braked to a halt one of the men, apparently the leader, strode up. He eyed them with respect; to own a car like that in Spain one must be of some importance.

"A thousand pardons for this interruption," he said to Don Ramon.

Don Ramon was looking at Steve and what he saw in the American's eyes spurred him into his act. "Don't apologize and get out of our way! My friends and I are in a hurry."

The police official was sweating a little. One word from a man like Don Ramon and he could lose his position, if not worse. But he had to stick it out.

"Please bear with me a moment," he begged. "Perhaps you saw a man on the road. He is dangerous; an escaped criminal."

"No one!" Don Ramon snapped.

"You are certain?"

"Do I look blind?" Don Ramon snarled.

The official gave up. "Please accept my apology, señores, señorita." He waved to his men and they wheeled the road block out of the way.

"Nice acting, Ramon," Steve said as they got under way again. Don Ramon didn't acknowledge the compliment. He seemed to have only one thing in mind, to get to Barcelona as fast as possible and dispose of his guest.

He was too anxious. As the car hurtled toward an intersection an ancient touring car loaded with gypsies came out of a side road directly into their path.

Don Ramon slammed on the brakes but kept the wheel straight ahead as though it were frozen. There was only one thing to do and Steve did it.

Hurling himself across Marina he grabbed the wheel and spun it so that they were skidding in the same direction as the touring car. There was a split second that lasted for eternity, and then a slight bump as they came to a stop with the running board touching the one on the gypsies' car.

STEVE got out of Marina's lap and looked down at her. The girl's face was pale but there was a slight smile on her lips and Steve felt a tremendous admiration for her. Don Ramon was cursing the gypsies and wiping his brow with a trembling hand at the same time.

"You saved our lives," Marina said.

"His own too," Don Ramon reminded her. "If it had not been for him we would have passed that point long before the gypsies got there. And if it hadn't been for a sudden whim of yours we would not be going to Barcelona at all."

"Put it down to artistic temperament," Marina smiled.

"Oh, you're an actress," Steve blurted.

"Yes. In Theatre Madrid."

Don Ramon took his eyes off the road long enough to glare at them. "Soon you will be giving him a free ticket to one of your performances."

The girl laughed a clear and tinkling laugh. "It is terrible to be in love with a jealous man," she told Steve. "But you'd be surprised how nice he can be when he wishes."

"Is he an actor too?"

She laughed again and it took the sting out of her next words. "Oh, no! He could play only one role, the big bad wolf!"

Don Ramon smiled at that, yet it was not a real smile but rather as though he were enjoying a private joke. Steve didn't like the smile at all. Suddenly he was aware that they had become too friendly.

They were passing through the suburbs of Barcelona now, and as they rounded a turn Steve could see the big cathedral on the hill in the center of the city.

Marina was still talking. "Ramon is one of the idle rich. He flits about, popping up unexpectedly wherever the mood takes him. There are rumors that he is connected in some way with the government, but these day one can

never tell." She looked at Steve. "Are you really a dangerous criminal?"

He shook his head. "No. I was arrested for whistling the wrong tune."

It was a shock to him when he saw how sad her eyes became. He had said it as a joke and only after he saw its effect on Marina did he realize how seriously it could be taken. There is only one way to keep a people subjugated and that is to censor even their thoughts. And Steve saw the truth of Velasquez's warning. He had already had two examples of Falangist efficiency and he was beginning to feel as though he were under constant surveillance.

"I'll be getting off here," he ordered as they came to a busy street intersection. Both Ramon and the girl were looking at him as he got out, looking at the bulge his hand made in his pocket. On a sudden impulse he took his hand out and smiled.

"Presto! No gun." He turned his pocket inside out and showed them it was empty. Their reaction was unexpected. Both of them were laughing as the car roared away, leaving him standing at the corner. Yet he was certain as he could be that each of them was laughing for a different reason.

HE FOUND a book stall and bought a paper-backed copy of "The Three Cornered Hat." Thrown in with the book were free directions for getting to the dock section by street car. With the aid of the directions Steve reached the warterfront in some twenty minutes.

Here he ran into a bit of trouble. The streets were narrow and crooked, and it seemed that in every cellar there was a cafe. Since few of them had signs—and even those were weather beaten beyond legibility—Steve was faced with the necessity of asking for the cafe by name and he was fearful of leaving any trail, however faint. He realized how foolish he had been to ask the truck driver for information about the cafe. What if he had been taken alive?

Luckily, as in every seaport the world over, there were plenty of drunks on the streets even in broad daylight. Steve collared one who looked as though he were just sober enough to talk and found out that he was only fifty feet from the cafe.

Tio Malo turned out to be a fairly clean place although it was damp. It was crowded with dock workers and sailors, a fact for which Steve was thankful. Otherwise a man with a book might have been too conspicuous.

In a little while a man came to his table and sat down across from him. Steve kept his eyes on the pages of the book but was conscious of a prolonged scrutiny.

"A good book, señor. I know an old fisherman who favored it above any of the new ones."

Steve looked him over. A neat man in a dark business suit and a straw hat. An efficient looking man, this was, with his waxed moustache and his cold, watchful eyes.

"And what did this old man look like?" Steve asked.

The eyes got even more watchful. "I have forgotten. My memory is short."

"A short memory, a long life," Steve quoted the old Spanish proverb. "And there are many such on the beach between here and Mataro."

The neat man nodded. "Señor, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Lopez."

"I thought it would be. Can we talk here?"

"No. Outside will be better."

They walked for a while in silence, Lopez leading the way, and Steve saw that they were going ever deeper into

the old quarter of the city. Here the houses leaned crazily against each other as they sagged on damp rotted foundations. The streets grew crowded with ragged children and with people who bargained loudly at the outdoor market stalls.

Lopez stopped suddenly and drew Steve into a dim hallway. "Quickly now. You have papers?"

"Yes."

"Give them to me. Here are your new ones. You are now Antonio Gonzales of Toledo. Also a reservation for the Hotel Nacional. Go there, register and wait."

Before Steve could ask any of the questions which had sprung into his mind Lopez had darted out of the doorway and was back. "We can go now."

But they had not gone more than ten steps when Lopez halted. "Wait!" he whispered tensely. "Police!"

Steve looked around. The street seemed exactly as it had been when they left it a few minutes before. He could see no uniformed men.

"Where?" he asked. "I don't see anyone."

"Don't try to see them," Lopez told him. "Act natural, as though we had forgotten something and were going back for it."

AS THEY sauntered back to the hallway Steve saw a figure detach itself from the front of a building across the way. It was a sailor who had been leaning there, smoking. From a stall a few doors away came a man who a moment before had been bargaining for a pair of trousers.

"Damn them!" Lopez grunted. "I could smell them. Up the stairs now!"

They dashed madly up the creaking stairs. As they hit the second landing the door below crashed open and heavy feet began the ascent behind them.

At the top of the third flight was a series of rungs set into the wall to form a ladder up to the skylight. "We'll go over the roofs," Lopez told Steve. "You open the skylight while I keep them back."

The Spaniard drew a pistol and snapped two shots down the stairway. From below came a groan and the footsteps stopped coming.

It was a moment's work for Steve to get the skylight open. "All right," he called down. Lopez clambered up and they came out on the roof together.

They were too late. Men were already pouring out onto adjoining roofs and converging toward them. Lopez ducked down behind a parapet and whispered to Steve to join him.

"We're trapped," the Spaniard said. "Give me your papers."

Steve handed them over and saw Lopez drop them down a gently smoking chimney. "Whatever happens now," he told Steve, "remember this. Die in silence."

A hand showed itself over the top of a skylight and the gun in Lopez' hand barked. The head disappeared.

"Wait a minute," Steve whispered to Lopez. "I'm not ready to die yet, in silence or otherwise. First I've got a job to do."

The Spaniard looked at him calmly. "That sounds as though you have an idea. What is it?"

"I don't think they want us dead," Steve told him. "If you've noticed, there hasn't been any shooting on their part."

"I have noticed. Go on."

"Well, by now I think they've got all their men up here on the roofs with us. If we can fight our way through to a skylight we may be able to get back down to the street."

"Hardly possible. There are too many of them."

"Not in one place. They're scattered around."

Lopez made up his mind fast. "All right. We'll try the one next to us. I'll go first."

They broke from cover like a pair of startled quail, Steve right on the Spaniard's heels. Ahead of them three men materialized and others were coming in from the sides. But Lopez held his fire until they were only ten feet from the skylight.

When he started shooting his aim was perfect. There was one shot for each man, raising puffs of dust on their breast pockets. Steve cleared the bodies at one leap and was only a step behind Lopez at the skylight when he felt a hand on his shoulder. It stopped him, whirled him about.

He came around swinging and caught the man behind him flush on the jaw. For a second Steve was free, and then from one side the man in the sailor suit left his feet in a flying tackle that drove the American to his knees.

Steve grabbed a handful of hair and yanked with all his might but the sailor's grip stayed tight. Then there was a hand on Steve's collar and he felt himself pulled backward to the edge of the skylight.

Lopez' gun roared in Steve's ear and the grip on his legs was released. His hand came away from the sailor's head all covered with blood.

But there wasn't time to think of that now. Lopez was pulling him through the skylight and Steve felt himself falling. He landed on his feet and got out of the way just in time to make room for the Spaniard.

THEY were in a long hall and the stairway was not in sight. But Lopez seemed to know every one of these buildings. "To the right!" he panted.

This time Steve was in front. As they went around the corner he could hear men dropping down behind them. And ahead, at the top of the stairs, the way was blocked! These two were in uniform, the regular police. They came toward Steve at a run.

He waited expectantly for the sound of Lopez' gun. When it didn't come he realized that it must be empty. He met the rush of the first policeman with his fists, stopped him and drove him back. There was a sound of ripping wood as a rotten railing gave way and Steve saw the uniformed man disappear into the stair well with a shriek.

The other one stopped short and clawed for his gun. It was out of the holster, coming up, when something whizzed by Steve's ear. The force of the thrown knife drove the policeman back and held him for a moment as though he were pinned against the wall by the blade in his throat. Steve grabbed the gun from his lifeless fingers as he went past.

"Stay close to the wall," Lopez warned from behind him.

That way they were protected by the staircase itself and although there were cries to halt no bullets followed them. They had almost a two floor lead when they got to the bottom.

Again it was Lopez who prevented him from dashing directly into the street. The Spaniard's voice remained cool. "Slide along the building to your left. They will be leaning over the roof." Steve remembered the gun in his hand and passed it back.

There was a crowd gathered in the street. Not a curious, eager crowd, but a mob of sullen and oppressed humanity. At sight of Steve and Lopez they began to run, disregarding the shouted commands from above to stop the fugitives.

Hugging the building, the two had almost reached the corner when the

first policeman showed his head out of the doorway from which they had come. Lopez drove him back inside with a shot that missed his head by inches.

As they made the turn a taxi rolled past them at the curb, its door open. The driver waved and they cut across the sidewalk and dived inside. Without a wasted instant the cab picked up speed, flinging them back against the seat. There were no questions and Lopez gave no directions. The cab hurtled through the narrow, crowded streets, the horn blasting open a path before it.

When at last they stopped they were in a section which looked as though its newest dwelling had gone up in the fifteenth century. The driver turned in his seat and looked at them questioningly. "Satisfactory?" he asked. Lopez nodded and got out, followed by Steve.

The American reached into his pocket and pulled out a bill but the driver waved him away. "Por la republic," he said softly. Steve studied his face but it was just the face of a taxi driver, not a hero.

"One of your men?" he asked Lopez as they went through a doorway cut in solid granite.

The Spaniard shrugged. "There are many such. He saw a chance to help us and took it. Our only recommendation to him was that we were running from the police."

HE LED the way down to a subterranean cellar where the air was damp and the odors as old as the building. It was totally dark here, yet Lopez led the way as easily as though it had been brightly lit. There were scurrying sounds in the darkness around them and several times Steve felt something run across his feet.

"Most of these passages were dug centuries ago," Lopez informed Steve. "The rest we built during the civil war. The cellars for blocks around are connected in this way. It is very seldom the police venture here."

After what seemed an hour of trudging in the dark to Steve, Lopez lit a match. In its flickering light Steve could see that there were numbers marked on the walls of the passage. After that Lopez lit a match every few minutes until he found the number he wanted.

The door opened into the sub-cellar of a large tenement. A moment later they emerged into the littered basement, went up another flight, and came out in the kitchen of a restaurant on the main floor. There was a villainous looking man bent over the stove but he paid no attention to them.

"What now?" Steve asked.

"I have a room upstairs," Lopez told him.

He led the way through a side door in the kitchen. His room was on the top floor, and as they entered, Steve could see that the windows opened onto an unbroken sea of rooftops. The American felt as though he'd been run through a wringer but he saw that Lopez was as calm as ever.

"That was a narrow escape," Steve offered.

"One gets used to them after ten years," Lopez told him.

"I don't wonder that you've lasted that long. You are very talented with weapons."

The Spaniard's eyes were bitter. "That there were already an end to such talents! But it is always the little ones who are killed, never the big ones. To get rid of them we will need help from outside. If you succeed in getting what you came for perhaps that help will come."

"Do you know what it is that I came to Spain to get?" Steve asked.

Lopez shook his head. "No, although there are rumors. Secret documents of the government, secret reports of the national bank, are said to be missing. Who took them is not known; someone high in the government and working alone, it seems. Whoever it is, he is not one of us. It is merely our job to see that you get away safely."

"Since the police know, I don't see why you shouldn't," Steve told him. "These documents give the name of every German who escaped to Spain. They also tell just how much money was deposited in Spanish banks by the Germans during the war. They show exactly what influence is exerted even now by the Germans over the government of Spain. If what we have been told is true, those papers will bring the downfall of the government."

FOR the first time the Spaniard's face showed excitement. "No wonder the police are everywhere. Well, we have got you through this far; we will get you out of the country too. Arrangements have been made for that?"

Steve shrugged. "I don't know. I suppose I'll be told where to go when I get the papers."

Lopez nodded. "Better that way. But it grows dark now. You must be on your way."

"How do I go?" asked Steve.

"There is always a taxi in front of the restaurant. It will not take more than fifteen minutes."

Steve suddenly remembered something. "What about those identification papers?"

"Unless you are stopped you won't need them." Lopez got up and extended his hand. "Good luck."

For a moment Steve stood silent. He had come to like this neat little man tremendously in the short time he'd known him. I won't be seeing you again, I suppose?"

Lopez shrugged. "Who knows?" His eyes were sad as he watched Steve walk toward the door . . .

The taxi was standing outside the restaurant, just as Lopez had said it would be. The driver flicked away a cigarette as Steve got in and gave him a questioning glance.

"Hotel Nacional," Steve said. "And drive very carefully." The one thing he could not afford now was to be involved in an accident. But he was in luck; the driver seemed content to take his time.

The hotel was the city's newest, rising huge and impressive into the black Spanish sky. A doorman who was outfitted like a general opened the cab door for Steve. The American could not help contrasting this with the squalor which existed only a short distance away. This was Spain, a showy front hiding behind it the suffering and misery of a people.

The room clerk bowed low. "You have a reservation, señor?"

"Yes. Antonio Gonzales, of Toledo."

"Of course. I remember now. And your baggage?"

Steve thought fast. "It will be along tomorrow. Also, I am expecting a visitor."

The clerk nodded, smirking. He must think it's a woman I'm expecting, Steve realized. Well, what difference what the clerk thought?

Once in his room, Steve washed and found that he was hungry. He had not eaten since before dawn. And dawn seemed as though it had been days ago; it was hard to believe that he had landed in Spain that very morning.

He wondered why he had not told Lopez that he was to leave the way he

had come. But those few hours had taught Steve a great deal. It would have been endangering the life of Velasquez to mention that he would be waiting for Steve on that beach the next morning. The American recalled again how blithely he had spoken of the cafe to the truck driver and a shudder ran down his spine.

But that was past. The thing to do now was to think about the future. And there was nothing Steve could think of which would put him in a mood to face that future better than a thick steak and a bottle of wine. He called room service and ordered up a dinner.

HE WAS almost finished eating when the knock at the door came. For a moment he sat, his heart pounding. Was this it? Or had the police somehow traced him? Well, if they had, at least they wouldn't find the papers on him. And there was only one way to find out; open the door.

It was Marina! For a full minute Steve stood, unable to belive his eyes. She had changed clothes and was wearing an evening dress. There was a sapphire clip at her throat which intensified the blue of her eyes and reminded him of the Mediterranean on a sunny day.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" she asked.

"Oh, of course. It's just that you took me so by surprise. You're the last person in the world I was expecting."

She laughed her tinkling laugh. "I was passing through the lobby when you registered. Curiosity demanded that I find out how my fugitive was geting along."

Ordinarily Steve would have taken it slowly; now there was no time for sparring. "Are you sure it was just curiosity?" he asked.

She looked up at him. "What else could it be?"

"I don't know. There was something in your voice when you said that it was terrible to be in love with a jealous man which made me think that you really weren't in love with Ramon at all."

"And what would that mean?"

"It could mean that you were trying to protect me."

Her eyes fell and Steve's heart leaped as he saw that she was blushing.

"Am I such a poor actress?" she asked at last.

"No. But later, when I showed you that I had no gun, there was something in the way you laughed that told me you were happy I had put it over on Ramon."

"I was. Somehow I just couldn't bear the thought of you being captured by the police. There is something in your manner that is free, as though you were used to breathing a freer air than that of Spain."

"And you really don't love Ramon?" Steve persisted.

She shook her head. "I don't know why I should tell you this, but I feel that I want you to know it, Phillip or Antonio or whatever your name is."

"I know why you're telling me. And my name is really Steve."

"Steve." Her voice was low, a caress.

"Listen, Marina," Steve said. He was talking fast, trying to say in a few minutes what he would have liked to say over a lifetime. "We've got just a little while. You may never see me again; in fact I'm sure you won't. But I want you to know that I'm not a criminal. And more than anything else I want you to know that I love you."

Her eyes were full of unshed tears. "Why must it be this way? Why must we snatch at happiness and have it slip through our fingers almost before we

have found it?"

"I don't know," he said miserably. "But let's not talk about that. You'll have to go now; I can't tell you why, but you mustn't stay here any longer. It would be dangerous."

He pulled her to him, held her close and breathed deeply the fragrance of her hair, as though he could fill his lungs forever with it. Then his lips were on hers and they were soft and yielding, a promise which would never be fulfilled.

She was gone before he knew it, without goodbyes. But her perfume lingered behind her to keep him spellbound for a while. At last he pulled himself together and lit a cigarette to drive away the perfume. He had to think about other things now; later, if there was a later, there would be time for memories.

TIME passed slowly, on leaden feet. Steve filled it by thinking about the men he had met. First of all, of course, there was Velasquez, the Basque, who had been driven from his mountains. There was the old man in the fishing shack; he might have been an artist, Steve decided.

Then came Lopez, with his watchful eyes and his way of taking everything in his stride. The cab driver who had popped up in the nick of time was important too. Ramon belonged in a different class; he was the froth on the surface of the sea. One of these days that froth would dissolve, Steve thought grimly. The others were all bound together by one thing. Por la republic.

The knock came again, sharp and peremptory. It brought Steve out of his seat with a start. This time he answered at once. There was no sense in useless fears.

This man was tall. Steve recognized too late the long, straight nose, the haughty eyes. Don Ramon Alvarez de la Vega!

Before Steve could shut the door again Ramon was in the room. He was impeccably dressed in evening clothes and Steve noticed that he wore white gloves as he shut the door behind himself. For a moment he stood, sniffing quizzically the faint perfume in the air, and a bitter smile played about his thin lips.

"You've had a previous visitor, I see," he observed.

Steve disregarded that. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"Apparently something I shall never have," the tall man answered. His eyes were inscrutable as he removed one glove and dipped his hand into his inside coat pocket.

"I have something for you," he told Steve. The American wished desperately that Lopez had given him the policeman's gun.

But it was not a gun which came from Ramon's pocket. It was a long leather folder, well filled. "Something you have come a long way to get," the tall man finished.

Steve's eyes popped. "You! Then you're the one who stole those papers. You're the one who arranged all this!"

"Precisely," Ramon said. Suddenly he stopped, whirled, and Steve looked past him to see the door opening almost soundlessly.

It was Lopez who stood in the doorway, his straw hat tilted back and his eyes still watchful. Steve heaved a sigh of relief and turned to Ramon. The tall man stood as if petrified, his face ashen.

"It's all right," Steve assured him. "This is Lopez. He's one of us." He turned back, with a question on his lips, to the neat little man in the doorway.

"Don Ramon knows better," Lopez,

said, and Steve saw that his eyes were no longer sad, but bright and shiny, like those of the man on the beach at St Laurent.

"Allow me to re-introduce myself to you," the neat man continued. "Gomez, of the secret police."

HE LAUGHED at Steve's dismay. "It was a good act, eh? Of course it cost a few lives, but those are cheap enough."

"But there must have been a real Lopez."

"There was. We caught him yesterday and I had a talk with him. He decided to tell me what he knew." Gomez' smile was not pleasant.

"But why go through with the whole thing when you already had me in the bag?" Steve asked.

"Because we wanted the papers more than we wanted you. My predecessor was not so clever, if I may seem boastful. He caught the first American too soon."

"And you suspected me all along?" Ramon asked sadly.

"Of course. You had connections with the government which allowed you access to secret files. But you were too important a man to arrest on mere suspicion. I had to be sure."

"And now?" Steve asked.

Gomez shrugged. "At least you will be spared the questioning. It will be over quickly." His eyes were hard. "Now give me that folder."

It was a long chance, but Steve had to take it. He threw the folder squarely at the little man's face.

But Gomez wasn't there any more. He had moved, and suddenly there was a gun in his hand. Steve's rush carried him almost to the wall.

"You should know better than that," Gomez said mildly. "I could have killed you before you even reached me. And if you had succeeded you would still not get away. The lobby is filled with my men."

Behind him there was a rap at the door. Gomez dropped the gun back into his pocket and threw a warning look at Steve and Ramon. "Not a wrong move, now." He raised his voice. "Come in."

Steve's heart fell like a lump of lead and felt just as cold. It was Marina again and she was smiling and digging into her purse even as Gomez shut the door behind her.

"I forgot something while I was here before," she said brightly. For the first time she seemed to notice that there were others in the room besides Steve. "Oh, I hope I'm not intruding."

"Not at all," Gomez told her. His smile was oily.

"I'm sure I left one of my gloves here," she chattered on. "I had both of them when I came and you can see that there's only one now."

She took her hand out of the purse. There was a tiny gun in that hand and it made a sharp, barking sound as it went off. A tiny hole appeared in Gomez' forehead and he slumped to the floor, a look of startled disbelief still on his face.

Steve and Ramon were frozen with surprise but Marina snapped them out of it. "Hurry now! There will be others about." She picked up the folder and stuffed it into her purse.

The two men started toward the elevator and she had to call them back. "There is a freight elevator on the other side. "We'll take that."

WHEN they came out of the freight elevator they found themselves on a loading platform which faced the alley. The platform was deserted, the only light being that cast by a single electric bulb. Steve jumped down and

helped Marina to his side.

She led them toward a car hidden in the shadow cast by a projection of the hotel. Ramon stared at it. "How did you get my car?" he asked in amazement.

"I borrowed it one day not long ago," she reminded him. "It was easy to have duplicate keys made. At the time it was merely a precaution."

Ramon bowed low. "My astonishment and respect for you grow by the minute."

Steve was grinning. "There isn't much chance they'll ever catch us now."

"Don't be too sure," Marina cautioned. "Gomez may have divulged his suspicion of Ramon to others. In that case they will be looking for this car, and it is not a hard one to identify."

They were coming out of the alley now and Ramon slid the car into traffic. Apparently Gomez' body had not yet been discovered; the lobby of the hotel seemed quiet as they passed it.

For a while they rode the boulevards, going northward and not driving fast enough to attract attention. Steve recognized part of the route they had taken that afternoon. As they approached the outskirts of the city and headed through the suburbs Ramon let the huge roadster out a little. By the time they hit the highway the car was doing eighty.

"I retract the remark I made about your acting ability this afternoon," Marina said to Ramon. "You took me in completely."

"No more than you fooled me," Ramon returned the compliment. "I would not have suspected you in a thousand years."

"As an actress it was easy for me to avoid suspicion," she said. "It was expected that I do a great deal of moving about the country. Also, my profession gave me an entry into the homes of important people in the government."

"Like myself."

"Yes. To tell the truth, we suspected you of having connections with the secret police. My job was to keep close to you and to report all your movements."

The dashlight showed the smile on Ramon's thin lips. "I thought it was because you loved me. And your sudden whim to go to Barcelona today was because you had knowledge that our friend would be on the same road."

"Yes. I see now that I should have suspected your ready acquiescence to the trip. It was not like you to take it so graciously."

"Don't I get to take any bows?" Steve grinned.

Marina patted his hand. "Of course, darling. You are the hero of the whole enterprise."

Steve looked into the rear view mirror and his smile vanished. "Save the cheers for a while. It looks like we have someone behind us."

Ramon let the Isotta out another notch but the lights behind them kept gaining. By the time Badalona came into sight their pursuers had come up within a quarter mile of them. The wail of sirens cut through the night.

"I'm afraid they'll have phoned ahead," Ramon said. "There is probably a road block up."

"How about other roads?" Steve asked.

Marina supplied the answer. "There is a side road about a mile ahead which will take us around the city. From there we can follow the country trails until we get onto the highway to Mataro."

THEY were at the side road in less than a minute. Ramon switched off the car lights and made the turn in a cloud of dust. For a moment it looked

as if the car might overturn, then it straightened up. Behind them Steve saw the lights go past the intersection, then stop and come back. They had gained valuable time.

Once around Badalona the roads became almost wagon trails and their speed decreased accordingly. More than once Steve bounced as high as the roof of the car and he had to keep his hand over his head to save himself a bad bump on the cross bars.

They were on a road now which ran parallel to the main highway and about a mile to the west of it. As they went over a rise they could see lights strung along the highway like lanterns on a cord. Behind them the lights of the police car drew closer.

"Pull off the road here," Marina suddenly ordered. "We're opposite the fishing village now. We'll have to walk the rest of the way."

Ramon slid the Isotta up a path and parked it beneath a clump of oak trees. They got out and set off toward the sea in a slow trot. But they had temporarily lost the police car again.

When they reached the highway they found that a steady stream of motorcycles and police vehicles were patrolling it at regular intervals. Parked cars every few hundred yards threw light onto the road and made crossing a hazardous feat.

But they had to chance it. "As soon as this next car goes past we'll make a dash for it," Steve told Marina and Ramon.

They crouched on their toes like runners awaiting the starter's gun. A motorcycle came past them from the south and a moment later a black touring car swept down from the other direction.

Steve waited until the touring car was about fifty feet past them. "Now!" he barked. They scurried across the road like scared rabbits and headed toward the dim shapes of the fishing shacks.

Steve led the way toward the old man's place. It was dark inside, but at his first knock the door swung open.

"Who is it?" a voice whispered.

"The Americano," Steve told him. "There are others with me."

A hand pulled him into the room. Behind him Ramon and Marina followed. The door was shut and then the old man lit a lantern. Steve saw that the windows were securely covered with burlap. On a table lay two sub-machine guns.

"Velasquez is waiting at the wharf," the old man said. "You will take one of the guns and I the other. I will cover you if the police come this way."

He blew out the lantern and opened the door again. But they had not gone more than a few feet when the glare of a spotlight cut down on them. A police car had pulled up onto the beach and was sweeping it with a beam.

They ducked frantically and for a second it seemed that they had been unobserved. Then the beam swung back and fixed them as they ran. From the car dark figures poured and started toward the three.

THE old man whirled and cut loose with his gun. The light went out and the figures stopped coming. Ahead, Velasquez was calling encouragement. They pounded onto the wharf as the lights from other cars swept across the beach and made it as light as day.

The Basque had the motor running and the lines were already cast off. "Jump for it!" he yelled. Steve was in the air when the boat left its mooring. He landed in a pile of gear and saw Marina sprawled near him, motionless.

But there was no time to see if she was hurt badly. From the shore came a hail of gunfire which it was useless even to try to return. Velasquez left

a zig-zag trail of foam behind him. Steve found himself unable to keep his feet.

At last they were clear and it seemed they were through the worst of it. Then a gray shape loomed ahead of them in the water and a blinding searchlight cut across their beam. It was a coast guard cutter.

"Get that light!" Velasquez yelled as a shell burst near them in the water.

The Basque tried a daring maneuver. Instead of running he headed straight for the cutter. It gave Steve and the old man a chance to draw a bead on the searchlight.

They were answered by a hail of small arms and machine gun fire. Out of the corner of his eye Steve saw Ramon fall to the deck. He himself felt a slug tear into the fleshy part of his arm but forced himself to keep firing. He could hear bullets splintering the wheelhouse where Velasquez stood.

Beside him the old man clambered up on the gunwale, exposing himself, but getting at the same time a better shot at the light. Steve heard him grunt once but his gun kept firing, and suddenly there was a flash and the light went out. Velasquez flung the wheel over hard, throwing Steve against the gunwale. He reached for the old man and found that he was gone . . .

In the sun the water was as blue as Marina's eyes. Steve stood on the deck with his arms around her. They were alone. Ramon had been dead when they got to him. There was nothing to do but heave him overboard. Velasquez was in the wheelhouse.

"I'm afraid that maybe they won't let me into the country with you," Marina was saying. "I have no papers."

"Don't worry," Steve told her. "You're going to a place where people don't have to carry papers with them all the time. Besides, as the wife of an American citizen you won't have any trouble."

"But I'm not your wife," she protested.

"You will be," Steve said. "Just as soon as we get ashore."

★ THE GLIDER ADVENTURE ★

ONE day early in the nineteenth century a man named Sir George Cayley took his experimental glider model and ran hard against the wind. He was carried aloft for a few yards. From that humble beginning was born an offensive weapon of major value in the present war. For today, with the glider capable of sustained flights of hundreds of miles, military men have transformed it from the pet of a sports minded few, into a swift, silent, and deadly threat to the enemy's rear. It also is proving valuable as a mover of precious equipment, thus easing problems of supply.

It has been an uphill fight for the men who championed the glider to make others recognize its worth. Even in Cayley's era many inventors thought an engine was necessary for human flight, and the development of the glider was retarded. But by 1895 a German engineer named Otto Lilienthal launched his birdlike glider from a hilltop, and soared 900 feet. Then an American civil engineer named Chanute developed a biplane model which became the ancestor of the first successful airplanes.

Interest in the possibilities of gliding took hold. The famous Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, discarding the violent body manipulations that both Lilienthal and Chanute depended upon to maintain balance, invented a process of warping the wings and a method whereby the glider rudder and wing surfaces were shifted as the air currents changed. After becoming expert gliders and substantially improving upon the Chanute biplane model, the Wrights turned their attention to building a motor for the plane in which they made history.

The birth of the airplane cast the glider into the shadows as far as public attention went, but every once in a while a new record was announced and interest revived. In 1922, for the first time, sustained soaring flights of more than an hour were recorded at a meet in Germany. Soon successful meets were held in other countries and the records for distance and height mounted rapidly.

The final chapter on air power in this war is still to be written, but already the glider is shaping up as an integral factor in modern Aviation.—*Lester Libo.*

The leader lifted his rifle in a sign of parley

return. Damn embarrassing, saying the Father of the Scourge did it. Almost as embarrassing as having one's troops stampeded by a handful of so-called filthy darvishes. And being captured by them. Huh! Maybe *that* explains the suicide play in Omdurman!"

ALL of which was reasonable enough to make Carver drop the entire matter. Having become accustomed to the directness of Arab and Soudani, he was quite unable to unravel the complicated thoughts of Britishers; and Carver had work of his own to plan, the details of getting into Suakin ahead of his men, assuring Irene that the colonel was safe, and then leaving town with her before he arrived. He began wondering about Harrod Flint, who might have survived loss of face. He made a list of key men to bribe, then settled down to figuring what he would do, if he were in Flint's place . . .

"The colonel never forgets and he never learns," Carver told himself, as his men made camp near the Atbara's dry bed, and began to dig for water. "Flint never forgets, and he never stops learning. Different sort of Britisher. Harder to handle because he's no gentleman, so he always has to use his head. . . probably have to kill Flint some day or other . . . rather like that, too, only in a way, I wouldn't . . . Maybe Flint's been shifted to Intelligence with Kitchener," he concluded, hopefully. "Should've been there all the time . . ."

That night, he posted twice as many guards as he normally would have. It was unlikely that Osman Digna had as yet got word from Omdurman, but this was no time to be taking chances—his patrols would suspect any group of strangers. And high bred camels were valuable loot.

At the first gray of dawn, just as the men were breaking camp, a shout rang from the north. The guard posted on the ridge whipped his camel to a racing gait. Whether to ride, or whether to get the animals sheltered from stray bullets and then settle down to fighting it out depended on that man's report.

"Ten-fifteen, on horse, carrying guns!" he shouted. "Riding fast."

Horsemen on the gallop meant that they knew what they were looking for, and knew also where they'd find it. Carver shouted to those about him, "Hobble the camels, make for that ridge, but don't shoot till I give the word."

Two or three well ordered volleys would usually stop a raid, where individual blazing away had little effect. When he reached the ridge, and handed Malika's reins to his groom, he saw the line of horsemen, black splashes above the brush. The light was improving. By the time they got within good range, he'd have a surprise for them.

"More like twenty," he decided. "Empty four saddles and they'll change their minds. You, there, keep your head down!" He glanced along the line of riflemen, and cautiously squinted through a clump of brush. "They know where they're going, all right."

"Look, *sahib*, one rides ahead!"

Carver's glance shifted. A man on a white horse was making straight for the ridge. The rest of the line halted. He raised his gun into the air and fired five shots. Judging from the whiplash *smack*, it was a Lee-Metford, taken from a British soldier. Having emptied

the magazine, the horseman reined in, and held his rifle horizontally over his head.

"Old beggar has a white beard," Colonel Dayton said, after a moment of peering from cover. "Will you parley?"

"Might as well. The others are too far to knock down. By the way, you keep well out of sight. Their eyes are very likely better'n yours, and your color'll give you away." He spoke to Aswad, then turned back to the colonel. "I've just told my man to knock you flat unless you keep below the ridge."

"But if you parley, they'll know—"

"Keep down!"

Carver grabbed a rifle, fired two shots. After handing the weapon to Aswad, he rode down the slope to meet the white bearded man. In the strengthening light, the figure, the horse-gear, the man's posture, all became unpleasantly familiar. While there were no darvish patches on his jubba, that was no saving grace.

PRESENTLY, reining down to a walk, Carver clearly saw the lean face, the curved nose with the flaring nostrils, the large, expressive eyes of the Arab who had come to meet him: a man close to sixty, alert as a hawk, and smiling a little. This was Osman Digna, who had fled from more battlefields than any man in the Soudan. And had always returned to fight again, and dangerously.

"Father of the Scourge," the old man said, "between you and me there is peace. Give me the Frangi colonel, and go in peace."

Simple, amiable, persuasive; neither threatening nor glaring; he spoke rather as an older brother, or as a father, trying to explain to a junior how a hard task could best be done easily.

Carver drew a deep breath. "We seldom meet, Osman Digna. Sometimes I've run, sometimes you've run, and victory is from Allah. The Khalifa got word to you?"

Osman Digna smiled. "Word comes as it comes. I could have over-ridden your guards and made an end of this. But all I need is one Frangi colonel, the one who went out to find me, and they found him instead."

Carver's eyes reached beyond the master slave trader, and once more took in the riders who waited, a long way beyond. Osman Digna made a gesture of warning. He said, benevolently, "There are other parties. You are surrounded. So, you can honorably surrender without fighting. Ought there be a blood feud between you and me? Need there be one? Wars end, feuds do not."

This could be a bluff, but Carver was by now very sure that he heard only the truth: and the truth made him feel old and tired and beaten. However swift Osman Digna might be in flight, he was equally sure in attack, when it was his hour to win; and this was his hour. But Carver said, "There is more, and there is also less, than the Khalifa behind this. I am that infidel's *rafiq*—he is on my head, he is in my face, until I get him within sight of Suakin."

"You mean this, Father of the Scourge?"

"I mean it."

"Go speak with your men. Go look again from the ridge, and see."

"Go tell your men to come and get us. I don't need to talk to my men." He salaamed to Osman Digna. "And victory comes from Allah!"

CHAPTER XVIII

CARVER, rejoining his men on the ridge, looked about him and saw the groups of riders dotting the brush.

While this was by no means a close cordon, nothing of the sort was needed, for, whichever way he turned one of the parties of darvishes would intercept him. It was something like the end-game on a chess board: great spaces between the forces, yet the opponents were firmly locked as on a crowded board.

He glanced down the dry bed of the Atbara, sizing up the thorn brush, the slender trunks of *dom* palms, the scrubby acacias. For a while, he could race upstream, and without offering a target to the darvishes on the plain: but he'd be headed off, for in short dashes, darvish horsemen could ride rings around any camel.

They were waiting, some with lance heads twinkling in the sunrise, others with rifle resting easily across the saddle bow. These men, working from established camps, travelled light, whereas Carver's animals were loaded with water and dhurra for a long march over desert country.

"Can't outride them, can't outfight them, not in the open," he pondered.

The thing to do was to stand fast, and hold the ridge. Regardless of orders, Osman Digna wouldn't be fool enough to rush a stoutly held line. He valued his men, and he believed that there was no use winning unless most of his force survived to enjoy the victory. Carver beckoned to Aswad and Habeeb, and said, "Let them come and get us. Even if they come from front and rear at the same time, we'll drive them back a couple times. We're so close to the river they can't cut us off from water. There'll be a time when they won't be watching sharply—then we'll ride down full speed and get through."

"By then they'll get help," Aswad objected.

Carver shook his head. "Won't wait that long. It'll be some time before the old man will admit he needs help. No matter who gave him his orders, he won't pay more than so much to get any Frangi, not even if we had Kitchener with us. How do the men feel, Habeeb?"

"Well, *sahib*, and not afraid."

"I mean, about protecting an infidel?"

"You are his *rafiq*, and we are your men."

THAT meant, they'd stick to a finish, because the Father of the Scourge had undertaken something which was not worth the doing. In times past, they had faced risks as heavy, and for nothing more than a share in the sale price of a batch of slaves. This time, their profit would be equally great: whether one Frangi, or a long line of blacks, it should make no difference, yet to Carver, there was a difference, since all this was peculiarly personal. He stood to profit in a way for which nothing he could give his men would be a true sharing of the gains. Aswad read his thought, and said, finally, *"Sahib*, he is on your head. We have started this thing with you, and the power is with God!"

"Yes, it is just that simple," Carver agreed. "So—"

But he didn't give the order. A man exclaimed, somewhat in anger, but most in amazement. Hooves clattered. A horse snorted. Curb chains jingled. Carver whirled just in time to see his groom rolling among the rocks, and clawing for his dagger. Colonel Dayton, sabre in hand, had mounted Malika. The Arab mare took off with a mighty bound. She swooped down the slope, swift as a falcon striking.

"Come back, you God damn fool!" Carver shouted. Then, *"Mount up and follow!"*

Malika was a costly luxury, pam-

pered as any queen. She drank camel's milk, and ate dried meat or dried fish on desert marches. She ate and drank when men went without. She was a nuisance, except when one needed the courage of her race, to face a lion, or charge a hedge of spears; and, for a few miles, nothing in the entire desert could escape or overtake her. But most of all, such a horse gave Carver prestige, which was worth whatever it cost him. But now Malika's swiftness was costing him all that he had, or hoped to have.

The racing camels, ready to march when the alarm had first sounded, got under way faster than they ever before had done. In a few hours, they'd feed the Arab mare their dust, but now she was so far ahead that the rocks she kicked up did not hit them in the teeth.

Dayton rode well, despite the handicap of the Arab saddle and gear. He held his sabre at the port as he made for a wide gap between two of Osman Digna's patrols.

The darvishes, taken by surprise, were confused. One group shouted to the other. They lost time in wheeling to block him. But for this, he'd had no chance, for not even Malika's speed could have offset their advantage of position.

Carver prodded his camel, the *hejin* he habitually rode to save Malika, who was only for battle, or for state occasions. He called to Aswad and Habeeb. They passed the word along. They needed no advice. Now that it had happened, they knew precisely what to do. Swords leaped out; lances came into play; Carver had never been able to convince his men that revolvers were the weapon for chewing a hole through a line of enemy horsemen.

Malika skimmed over the broken plain, she soared over gashes cut into the earth by cloudbursts, yet the lay of the land hampered her, and the odds were too heavy. Like pincers, two leading groups of darvishes were closing in ahead of her. Dayton looked back, once, then faced the horsemen who had closed the gap.

Dust rose. Steel flickered and rang. Dayton's bull voice rumbled over the confusion. There was a glimpse of him through a rift in the dust. Slash—parry—lance and sword—then dust again, and Malika, without a rider, was clear.

Somewhere in the mill, Dayton was afoot, or clawing the earth.

CARVER'S camel men hit the line. The darvishes, wheeling to face them, had not picked up speed. Camels and horses went down. Carver heard nothing after that first crunch and crash of meeting, not even the blast of his Colt. He felt its recoil, and then saw that he was through the line, and with most of his men. Behind him, men afoot slashed and thrust at each other, and at horsemen. He caught a glimpse of Dayton, who was getting to his knees. The colonel still had his sabre.

Malika, riderless, looped about. Tossing her head, she came to Carver. He leaped from the *hejin* to her back, and drew his second revolver. No time for reloading.

The Hadendowa spearmen wheeled, but getting camels to turn and repeat their stampeding drive was too much. This was for footmen or horsemen.

Carver charged. He swerved, ducked a lance, emptied a saddle; pivoted, knocked over a swordsman. The entire line was a straggle of battling handfuls. The ground near Dayton was fairly clear of all but men still stunned from the first clash. Malika's speed gave Carver his chance. In a flash, he was beside Dayton, and helping him up.

"She'll carry double—"

Then the return.

"Take my gun—give me that sabre—"

Only, there was no line to face. Yells, shots, commands; a pounding and rumbling from the direction of the dry river; and Osman Digna's distant groups wheeled about, instead of closing in. Once more, the desert fox was retreating, and this time without cause.

It was not until Carver saw the line of cream colored camels and the lance heads twinkling through the dust, that he knew what had happened. The men from Omdurman, his own men, had made good time. They had crossed the Nile, they had passed through the British lines, and they had come to hunt him along the Atbara.

Even now, Osman Digna's troops had the advantage of numbers, but surprise had done the job. Carver, having cut through, could not be surrounded again. The only way would be in a running fight, and no Frangi colonel was worth the cost; so the darvish emir withdrew.

Protected by reinforcements, Carver's men had time to bandage their wounds, and the colonel's. Dayton was in bad shape. A lance had bit deep into his side. He wheezed. A red froth foamed from his lips, and caked his moustaches. Beneath dust and blood, he was lead-gray. He shivered; despite the morning heat, his skin was cold.

"Shock," Carver said, with forced cheeriness. "You took a crisp hewing. But if you can hang on, we'll get you to a doctor in Suakin before fever sets in."

DAYTON began coughing. For a moment, he seemed on the point of doubling up. Then he got himself in hand. He tried to sit, and he wiped cold sweat from his forehead. "Don't mind the slashes, but being skewered—uh—joke's on you, you've not a chance of getting me to Suakin."

His color improved a little. He was almost cheerful as he gave what Carver knew was a correct estimate of the case. "Get going, get going, we can't dally here, those beggars'll soon find they got the wind up for no good cause."

Vultures now circled, waiting to pick the bones of two animals. The Hadendowas were lashing a dead comrade to a camel. "Might tie me on the other side," Dayton proposed. "Balance the load."

Carver eyed him. "Don't be a damn fool. "You'd be amazed how much spear head a man can digest. You, Saoud! Cut some scrub, make a litter—"

"I can sit a horse. We haven't time—"

Grimly, he thrust Carver's restraining hand aside, and got to his knees. His color was returning. "Let me alone," he snapped, and began straightening up, a bit at a time, until finally he was on his feet. Though wavering and swaying, he stood.

He did let them help him to the saddle. And the column rode on.

Carver frowned as he thought it over. Dayton must have realized, from hearsay, and from his own experience, that a handful of determined men could have held the ridge until darkness gave cover for a sortie offering every chance of winning. Half a dozen soldiers and an officer, cut off from their command in a skirmish much like the one which had led to Dayton's captivity, had held a knoll against repeated darvish charges; this had been at Teroi Wells, only a few years previous. Dayton's one-man charge simply did not make sense. Even had he gone through, untouched, he would have ridden to certain doom in the desert. And he had not been driven by panic.

"Too proud," Carver finally decided, "to have renegades risk their necks de-

fending him. The old *noblesse oblige*. The gentleman blockhead. Tradition if it kills him." But there was more of admiration than of mockery in the estimate; and where Dayton was invariably sure of himself, since there was a traditional precedent for everything, with variations not to be considered, Carver found himself sinking into a muddle of doubt and query.

HE COULD have stood fast, to let Dayton handily make Irene a widow. Instead, Carver had thrown his entire force against the darvish pinchers, and for no good reason. If Malika had been a little slower—if she had stumbled and fallen—if she had failed in jumping a gully—

The entire business of sailing with Irene had become complicated; and this had started during the dash he and Dayton had made, racing the *mulazemin* to the Nile.

As the day wore on, Carver became accustomed to seeing the colonel stay in the saddle. He'd seen Arabs and Soudanese ride with wounds as bad, or worse. Better sit a horse than be lashed to a camel; and better anything at all than have fallen into Osman Digna's hands.

True, they'd used up their luck ration in escaping from Omdurman. Something had to go against them later, yet it was more than curious how Osman Digna had got word so quickly. Curious that he had in person supervised the raid.

They halted at one of the hidden wells without which neither outlaw nor slaver could have plied his trade. Dayton crumpled, and Carver said, "I might've known this was coming."

They caught him before he slid from the saddle, though this only because one hand had a stubborn grip on Malika's mane. Two Hadendowas stretched him out in the shade of cloaks hung from spear heads and propped him up with a saddle. Carver knelt to give him a drink. This Dayton accepted but refused any further attention; he wouldn't let Carver look at the bandages.

"Nice and cool here, damn well can do with a breathing spell. Peg of whiskey would help. Mind sending your blacks away?"

Carver gestured. The men drew back. He knew, and they knew what was coming. It was also clear that Dayton also knew.

"Dare say you haven't any paper, or even a pencil?"

"Seldom time for correspondence on the march, Colonel." He beckoned, spoke to Aswad, who set to work at once. Carver resumed, "Camel blood, a sharpened stick, and the smooth side of a saddle pad, those'll be good enough. Now while you're waiting, tell me who it's for, so . . ."

"There's time enough I'll write it. You know, Carver, you had me puzzled. Quite puzzled. But it finally came to me. I'd seen in you in Cairo. Back in '85. You'd of course not remember me."

Carver drew a deep breath. "You recognized me. You were sure of it, just before you went and blew up that field gun."

"Right." He smiled, almost boyishly; he no longer had any appearances to maintain, no traditions to uphold; that Carver was not a gentleman had become irrelevant. "You'd—ah—become—notorious. So—I—suspected, then knew that you were the chap who'd been so attentive to Irene—Miss Marland—later my fiancee. You believed me when I told you why I blew up that gun?"

"It made sense, but—you'd—um—twisted a few facts."

DAYTON nodded. Then Aswad came with a cup of blood that had been thickened with the soot which the men daubed about their eyes to break the glare. He had sharpened a thorn brush twig, and split it a little. Dayton took it, dipped it, cursed because the nib had been slanted for the right-to-left direction of Arabic script, and began to write on the sheepskin. Carver, turning away, listened to the scratching, and to the writer's wheezing breath; once, teeth gritted, chillingly.

Finally Dayton said, "Here you are. My testimonial, to whom it may concern. That you risked—er—life and limb to liberate me, and so forth."

That left Carver blinking and gulping as he took the edge of the sheepskin. "Ah—how about—um—I mean, isn't there someone else—Aswad, bring something to write on . . ."

"Nothing at all, nothing at all." Dayton smiled with a blend of sadness, triumph, arrogance: The superiority of a man who has become greater than circumstance. "When I recognized you, I knew why you'd come. Because of Mrs. Dayton—made me feel ridiculous, you know—she'll not miss me, and —*harh!* Be mutual, as it were. Frightfully awkward, too, returning to Suakin —after making such an ass of myself —being bagged by Osman Digna's handy-man . . ."

Silence, broken only by hoarse breathing. The man's chin slumped to his chest. His hands stopped twitching, and went limp. He mumbled a little, as though in his sleep. Carver could not quite be sure, but it sounded as if Dayton was saying, "Never marry an American woman—regret it every time. . . ."

Carver now understood the tailor made muzzle-burst, and the one man cavalry charge. As he sat there he wondered whether Dayton's half-articulate mutter had been self-reproach, or friendly advice. He thrust the sheepskin testimonial aside, and watched his men gathering rocks to heap a cairn over their comrade who had fallen in the charge. To make sure, he felt for Dayton's pulse. Then he said, "When you're through there, help me get some rocks for this man."

The Hadendowas answered, *"Sahib,* he was a great fool, but a very brave man. Verily, he is good enough to lie here with our comrade."

This seemed a good epitaph; and Carver said, "Since that is good with you, it is good with me. I'll recite one *sura* for the two of them."

He picked up the inscribed sheepskin, and grimaced. "Too much like presenting a draft at a bank," he thought; and he said, "Lay this over him."

CHAPTER XVIII

ONCE more, Carver was in the enormous house which he had leased for his first meetings with Irene; and she, having got the message sent in advance of his arrival in Suakin, had not kept him waiting. Once more, the red haired woman in the form-disguising native gown lowered her veil, and regarded the Father of the Scourge. She regarded him as though his return was something not quite credible despite his towering there against the whitewashed wall.

"So you—you're back?" she faltered.

"I feel that way myself, I can't believe it, either."

The broad beamed maid backed through the doorway, and waddled down the hall. Irene shut the door. There was still a wall of unreality between her and Carver; unreality, and a query. He gestured toward the *angareb,* which, with two rickety chairs

and a table, was the only furnishing in the room.

"Sit down." He made no move to touch her; there was still too much to tell, and he had to pick his words to make the truth acceptable. "You didn't expect me back."

"Simon—I didn't realize—what you were going into. Until you'd left, none of the things I'd heard of the Khalifa meant anything. Then—well—. You must hate me for sending you."

"You didn't send me."

"I didn't try to stop you."

"Others tried, and it didn't work."

He took three quick strides toward the latticed window, and turned abruptly to face her. He read the query blazing in her eyes, the question still silent in her mouth. "You've not asked me when he'll be in?"

"I don't want to ask. I'm afraid. Afraid to hear what happened—you couldn't've got him free—Harrod Flint came to see me . . ." She shuddered, closed her eyes, "I've known all these days what you've faced, and it's still impossible, your being back."

"He and I left Omdurman. With nothing worse than a bad scare and a few scratches. Luck, you know. We left in such a hurry that none of the plans I'd made were any use, but we lived through the water shortage. Flint was right, only this was the exception. Fishing for information, wasn't he?"

"He knew about you and me, in Cairo. And he talked to *her*—she laughed at him, and said he could easily get in touch with you in Omdurman."

Carver pulled himself together. "We shipped the worst stretch, when Osman Digna nailed us. You're a widow. He saw Osman Digna, he took my horse, and charged out to get him. To make up for the fiasco outside of Suakin. He'd been brooding a lot, and he was light headed. Sun, and thirst. My horse—to fast, none of us could keep up with him. A pretty charge, but too much for one man alone."

He turned away to let her digest the story.

WHEN the silence began to make his skin twitch, he faced her. She looked numbed, incredulous; she was dry eyed, and fingering the edge of her veil, twisting it into a ball.

"You mean—oh, I know he had fixed ideas—you say since he'd gone out to get that darvish, and had been bagged himself, he rode out alone—oh, he couldn't've, no glory hunter would be that crazy!"

This was hard for Carver to take, but he controlled himself, though his voice shook, and he trembled as he had the day he had barely succeeded in not flogging Maryam. With patience which surprised him, he explained, "We were on a ridge, surrounded, but not tightly. Groups of darvish horse here, there, ready to close if we tried to ride through. Osman Digna came to parley with me. Wouldn't surrender the colonel. We did have a chance—stand off a few charges, then make a surprise break. That was when he grabbed my horse. He might have got through, but he'd used his ration of luck. Though where he'd gone after getting through is something else."

She looked at him, and said nothing.

"You don't believe me!" he exclaimed reading her eyes.

"It's not that, Simon. It's—well—it's all shocking—all these days of thinking—"

"With the kind assistance of Harrod Flint—listen!" He caught her by the arm yanked her to her feet. "Did he know you were meeting me here, today?"

"No—I'm sure he couldn't—my maid and I are the only one to leave

the house since your *chit* arrived. He'd not know you've returned, would he?"

"What difference?" He shrugged. "You don't believe I went to Omdurman, got Colonel Dayton out of town, and all the way to the Atbara River? You think I didn't do that?"

She made a hélpless gesture.

He said, "Harrod Flint convinced you it couldn't be done."

She didn't answer.

He repeated, "Flint proved I couldn't do it." No answer, and his composure cracked enough to make his voice rise. "Speak up! Flint told you how easy it'd be for me to come back alone with just the kind of story I finished telling you!"

"Simon," she pleaded, "Let me alone, I have so much to get used to. For days, I've considered you both gone for good. I've resigned myself to having sent you into that death trap. I was so sure you couldn't return that I—I—"

"Oh." He spoke gently now. "I understand. You made yourself believe you didn't want me to come back, because coming back seemed too impossible. I had thoughts like that about you."

HER eyes changed, and her face became more alive. Presently, she'd have a good cry. Hopefully, Irene said, "It's all a horrible dream, but it was something like what you've said."

Yet he sensed that she doubted him, and as long as that doubt existed, he didn't want her. If she swallowed her doubt, and only pretended it was gone, he and she would in the end resent and finally hate each other. Her doubt was all the worse because she would not speak it. She was afraid of her thought, afraid of her belief that he was tricking her.

Carver knew that if he ever got his hands on Harrod Flint again, he'd not take time to flog him. He'd make it easy for Flint, and for himself too. Flint, taking his vengeance, had but made good use of Carver's mocking advice, *"Cherchez la femme."* He'd sought, found, and used Irene, and beautifully.

Bitterness made Carver say, as the wall of silence solidified, "He gave me a testimonial written on a sheepskin. He wrote saying I had at great risk liberated him, and with fortitude guided him, and gallantly defended him; and that his wounds had been the result of his own needless action against the enemy, action taken entirely on his own initiative. That the outcome was such as to prove that if he had stuck to my planning, he'd come through unscratched. He wrote all this when he knew that death was at hand. He wrote freely and to do me justice."

"Oh, Simon!" she cried. "Where is it?"

Carver's lips tightened. "I buried it with him. Do you think I'd come back with a written proof for you, the way I'd hand a draft to a money changer's *shroff?"*

She evaded the question, and said, "Simon, I married him—he and I were once very much like any other—lovers—and—well, however much we drifted apart, we still did share a dozen years. This has given me a wrench."

"Of course it has. But my days in Suakin have to be few and quick."

"That *dhow* is still waiting."

He shrugged. "You still doubt me."

"No, it isn't that."

"You think it isn't! But you don't believe me. I'll wait as long as I can. Making a fool of Harrod Flint and the law has a limit I've just about reached." She made as if to speak, but he gave her no chance. "If you have one bit of doubt, if you're one bit unsure of your-

self, everything's poison. There's nothing for us."

"But Simon—"

"When you ring true, when you really believe me, I'll know it."

He turned abruptly, went to the door. There he paused, but his indecision was only momentary. Without looking back, he went quickly down the hall, and to the stairs. She had to be sure of herself, doubly sure, for while he could get beyond British law, he could never outrun his background. For her to sail with him now would be no different from having left while Colonel Dayton was hunting Osman Digna.

He could not forget that at the report of the colonel's death, she had hardly faltered; that she'd gone on with her preparations to leave. This time she was different, because she did not believe his story.

As he turned to make for el Kaff, he was thinking. "She either thinks he's still in Omdurman, or she can't quite choke down the notion that I made sure he'd not come back alive. That I was afraid she'd be sorry for him and back down."

HE STEPPED into the doorway of a vacant house, to watch her and the maid leave the rendezvous. He got barely a glimpse of them. They did not look in his direction. Dusk, moreover, deepened the shadows of the archway.

A sense of danger began to oppress him. Rather, a growing unease, a feeling of unpleasant anticipation, an unknown evil close at hand. Once more, it seemed, as it had before the march to Omdurman, that dark Egypt was reaching out to seize and hold him: not British law, not Harrod Flint, but "the land shadowed by wings."

Hucksters were going home with empty baskets. Shopkeepers were leaving the bazaars and the market stalls. Suakin's day was ending, and its oppressive night, its furtive and whispering night would soon begin. Any moment now, the *muezzin* would call from the mosque in el Kaff, "Come to prayer!"

The voices in the Greek cafe changed. The backgammon players quit chattering. *"Shesh-besh!"* one cried, shrilly, the last syllable very loud in the sudden hush. Then question, exclamation, a dozen answers. The game was forgotten, and so the glasses of *raki*.

Carver came from the archway. Though the street was very narrow, the distance he gained by going to the cafe door gave him a better chance to make sense of the excited jabber. News had come from some back alley.

Uniformed police passed him, on the run. A bugle brayed *"Assembly!"*

Then Carver got what had raced through the city: he got it from the jargon of Greek and Turkish, Arabic, Italian and Somali. "Yea, by the Lord of the Sunrise, I saw it myself," one said, gasping as though from a brisk run. "The head of the Frangi colonel, thrown at the gate of his own house, to mock him! *Aywah,* pickled in date brandy, it came from a long way, and not spoiled too much!"

Someone laughed. Another said that now the brandy was unclean, from the taint of an infidel's head. But Carver had heard enough.

Irene had beyond doubt arrived in time to see some one throw a loosely wrapped ball at the entrance of her house. Osman Digna's vengeance was perfect, better than he could have planned. Carver drew a deep breath, and strode briskly toward el Kaff, and the house which once had been his. He was entirely composed. There was no

longer any problem. There would be no waiting for Irene to overcome her doubts. Even if the grisly trophy had not been flung almost at her feet, she still would not be able to avoid the ordeal of formal identification, since date brandy was not the most perfect of embalming fluids.

"She wouldn't accuse me of trying to convince her that way," Carver tranquilly told himself. "But every time she looked at me, she'd see *that*."

Then he thought again of Osman Digna, who always ran, but never failed to strike back. Dayton had guessed why Carver had faced the dangers of Omdurman. And Osman Digna had more wit than his late prisoner, the prisoner he had kept in anticipation of the defeat at Nakheila, to send to the Khalifa when a gift would do the most good.

THAT night Carver said to Maryam, "What happened in town this evening leaves me only one move. I'm finished in Suakin. Gunboats will stop every *dhow* on the Red Sea, to look for me. This is something bribery can't fix."

"They have always looked for the Father of the Scourge," she said, after gravely considering. "And cursed God each time they met him."

He inclined his head, since what she said was true. Then, "It is more than that. When a man tries to quit the years he has lived, the years reach out to hold him. I go to make my peace with the Khalifa. His doings and mine have been like the strands of a rope. A man must be what he is, and clearly it goes wrong when he tries to be something else."

Maryam looked more than ever like a sculptured Egyptian queen; Maryam, indeed, *was* Egypt. She considered him, and his words, and then she said, "You can make your peace with the Khalifa, for you two have been like the fingers of one hand. So you go to stand with him on the plain of Kerreri, the battlefield of the prophecy?"

"Something tells me I have to. Just as the Khalifa has to. You see, when you and I came to Suakin to trade in slaves, we made a choice, and having made it, it has to be played to its end."

"That is true, Father of the Scourge."

"The slave trade has come to its end, but I have not, and he has not, and Osman Digna has not. We still have things to finish."

"You go willingly," Maryam said. "Because a grown man wants to do what he must do."

"That is right. Until checkmate is called, can any piece leave the board? Or ask to be in a game whose opening was different?"

"You will be free," she said, "when Kitchener says *shah mat* to the Khalifa."

"Or the Khalifa says *checkmate* to Kitchener."

"Go in peace, Father of the Scourge. And when all these things are done, you will be the chief piece in a new game."

He did not ask her what she meant, for she was Egypt, who spoke truths that neither listener nor speaker quite understood.

CHAPTER XIX

MAROUF, who because of his years could no longer ride with the Father of the Scourge, was a free man, and always had been; yet, like a cat, the old Arab had been transferred with the house in el Kaff, when Carver gave it to Maryam. His heart, however, was still with Carver, so after studying several days on whether or not he had done well to take a gift and a letter to

Osman Digna, the gray haired retainer carefully sharpened a silver hafted dagger which for a long time had had only ceremonial value.

The soft *snick-snick-snick*—of steel against whetstone had rhythm and music; it made thinking easier, just as chanting made it easier for seamen to make sail, or porters to carry their burdens. Finally when his questions concerning Osman Digna had taken shape, he respectfully approached Maryam, who was in the courtyard.

"*Sitti,* there are things which do not become plain from thinking," he said. "Now, the gold in this purse—" He dug in his belt, and got out a small, embroidered pouch. "Osman Digna gave it to me, and I took it. I rode and I rode, and I did that which was to be done."

"If Osman Digna gave it to you, it is yours."

"*Sitti,* that may well be." He glanced about. "But be pleased to sit where you can reckon, and where no one can hear. When the master went to Omdurman to get the infidel, I owed him certain sums. Doubtless you have the books."

So Maryam went into the *selamlik* and got the records. She found entries of advances to Marouf, and noted the dates. These she read, and he agreed, saying, "That is how I remember it. Now, did the master give you these debts? With the house?"

Marouf, she knew, was sufficiently thick headed, sufficiently honest, and sufficiently habit ridden to see a problem where none existed. Gold was gold; still and all, there was not enough at stake for her to risk making a decision which someone else might call unjust. Marouf might next approach a *qadi* and put her in the wrong.

"Go ask a *qadi.* What he tells you, it will be right."

"That would be shameful, asking a judge to decide between me and the master's family. What sayest thou?"

Maryam groped for precedent and found one: "What you owe me, you owe me. What belongs to the master, you owe him."

MAROUF replaced the purse. Maryam turned to the wall niche in the corner to put away the book. When she faced about, to give him permission to leave, she was cornered. A dagger, curve upward, was ready to rip her from waist to collarbone. There was no fending it off, and no use crying out: for the shock of the thrust, the short thrust and upward rip, would paralyze her, cut the sound before it was fairly shaped. She had seen such blades used before.

"What is this?" she asked, almost casually.

"What I owe the master, I still owe him. It is truly as you said. That message I carried, it was against the master. He goes to offer his life to Abdullahi the Khalifa because the infidel's head, thrown at the red headed woman's door, left him with no peace in Suakin."

Her life hung on a curve of steel the width of her hands, and perhaps twice as long: but Maryam's face showed no terror, and her voice was even when she asked, "You had the message read to you? When was it read, and what was written?"

"*Do not send the infidel to Omdurman,*" Marouf recited. "*The Father of the Scourge goes to redeem infidel because he has to, because there is no help for it; the man was his protected, and he has to do what he is going to do. So send the infidel's head back to Suakin, to prove that the Father of the Scourge was unable to redeem him. Then there will be peace between you and him, and those who had a claim on*

the Father of the Scourge will no longer have any claim; and the blessing of Allah upon you, and the Peace."

He had it letter perfect. Maryam nodded approvingly, and did not shrink against the wall, or glance down at the menacing blade. "When did you have this read to you, Marouf?"

"When I knew there was no harm in letting it be known. Riders came from Omdurman, saying the Father of the Scourge had left with the prisoner. All this was good until the Englishman started a fight. They told me that he had been badly wounded and could not live. Osman Digna followed, from a long way off, and he and I found the heap of stones. I thought that taking the head would be good for the master. Your writing told me it would. Now I see that it was bad, for he goes to the Khalifa, with whom no one ever makes peace."

"You might wait till you're sure," she suggested. "And unless you told what *you* did, there is no point to accusing me."

This made Marouf think and frown and agree, for a moment; then he said, "But my face is blackened. Surely he goes to death, does the Khalifa ever forgive any man?"

"He'll forgive the Father of the Scourge. And I'm going to Omdurman. Put up that knife, and quit trying to meddle in things you don't understand. Suppose he heard you finished me, do you believe he'd thank you?"

"He'd forgive me, what is a woman who no longer pleases him?"

"He tells *you* all his thoughts? Marouf, you went to great danger to help him. What you did was a help, it kept him from leaving Suakin with the red haired Frangi woman, the colonel's wife. Gun boats and cruisers would have chased him, hunted him, surely he could not have got away. But now she hates him for the sake of her husband's head. Come back and kill me when you know that it is not well with the Father of the Scourge."

And this, she saw, shook his purpose. The entire business had been a muddle to Marouf; he had figured that since the colonel was the master's enemy, and yet according to infidel custom, had to be rescued, the head would be best proof that the case was closed. What Maryam said made sense.

"Pay your debt to the master," she went on, "by guiding me to Omdurman. Then tell him what I did, and let him judge if I am guilty, or if you and I are both guilty."

He lowered the dagger. "On my head and eyes, *sitti*. If the Khalifa forgives him, then the less you and I say the better."

Maryam smiled, and graciously. She'd saved her life, and she'd won a guide who knew the desert as not even Carver or Osman Digna knew it.

It was not until the door had closed after Marouf that Maryam's knees buckled, and her stomach turned inside out. But later, when her maid, Ayesha, had helped her get straightened out, Maryam knew that she'd never again be afraid. She had died, and could not die a second time. So, why not go to Omdurman? Now that Egypt had clearly claimed Carver, and would not let him leave, he'd welcome her, and quit thinking of the people who were really no longer his own.

CHAPTER XX

ONLY half a dozen men had followed Carver to the Nile; and when these looked at Omdurman, they shook their heads. *"Sahib,"* said old Aswad, you need an army, we are not enough." And faithful Saoud asked him, "Must you do what you go to do?"

Carver looked at the few who had gone with him through the narrow gap still remaining between Kitchener's army and the plain of Kerreri. "For twelve years we have ridden together, and next to Marouf, you are my best. So I tell you, this has to be."

"He'll take your head."

Carver smiled a little. "Over in Omdurman, we saw men go to the scaffold saying it was Allah and not Abdullahi who sent them to death. Is the darvish a better Moslem than you?" And when they did not answer, he went on, "Is it not written, *though you mount the whirlwind to ride from your bread, your bread will mount the lightning to overtake you?*"

"That is written," Aswad admitted. "But you tempt Allah to strike you."

"Even when I have been right, the doing has finally brought wrong. I buried the infidel, and the taking of his head is held against me. So I have to go to Omdurman to see if all that I have done, and you have done with me, has been wrong. I go to find out what, fate has written. If it is evil, then Abdullahi will give it to me all at once, and you will go find a new way, a right way. If it is good, then Abdullahi will be friendly; I will have new knowledge, and new belief in my fortune."

"Some of this is clear," Saoud said, after puckering his wrinkles into a tight pattern. "But this we do not understand—where have you been wrong? We marched slaves to the Red Sea, and only the Frangi pig-lovers call that wrong."

"That is true, as far as it goes," Carver answered. "But it seems that there is no good in turning against my own people. I do not even know whether a man can ever turn against his own and become something else. Each time I tried to leave this land, it made something to hold me, so I cross the Nile to learn where I belong. I go to Omdurman to pay all that is held against me. This is not going to see a man, it is going to meet what is written. If you already know the answer, turn now and go home. Otherwise, wait here, you will not have long to wait."

They exchanged glances. He was for a moment afraid that he had shamed them into wishing to go with him, so he stepped back, and drew a line with his stick. "You are cut off from me, and I from you. Each of you give me a piece of money!"

They obeyed, offering him coppers and silver. Carver spread the six coins in his palm. "You have paid, there is nothing you owe. Whatever happens, it happens, and the power is with Allah!"

He turned, and mounted up, and rode Malika to the ferry. This was the first time he had ever gone to Omdurman without spearmen and camels to follow him.

IRENE, like the Khalifa, had become the embodiment of one of a pair of opposing aspects of fate; this became more and more apparent to Carver as he considered all that had happened since he had seen her and Harrod Flint for the first time in Suakin. All this coming together of things long apart and unrelated had been completed by Colonel Dayton's recognition, which had set in motion acts to build the final barrier between Carver and Irene.

Where he had always accepted his own rightness as something inevitable as daybreak or sunset, he now doubted: and however hazardous to face Abdullahi, it was not suicide, but rather, demand for an answer without which he could no longer be himself.

They knew him at the river, as he had expected them to do. Amazement kept the guards from striking or closing

in. "Take me over," Carver commanded. "I go to see the Khalifa."

So they ferried him across the Nile; and like those on the east bank, those on the west regarded him, heard him, and made no move to stop or to hasten him. What they read in his face made them give him his way: and then, they wondered whether the unpredictable Abdullahi, as quick to smile as to slay, had sent him summons and a pardon. Not knowing, it was best to do nothing.

Nearing the plaza and the Mahdi's tomb, he heard a beggar cry, "Alms, in the name of Allah, alms, O Emir!" The man had one eye, one hand, one foot. In a merciful mood the Khalifa had spared his life. Carver leaned low, dropped a Maria Theresa dollar into the outstretched palm, and said, "Save me a place beside you, O Brother!"

"Allah will repay you," the beggar answered, and his one inflamed eye widened from having seen a wonder such as its mate had never seen. "*Mashallah!* Father of the Scourge!"

At the door of the black paved hallway, he dismounted, and surrendered his pistol belt and silver mounted dagger. They let him go into an anteroom to wait. There he sat, and listened to the voices of those who attended the Khalifa: the *qadis,* the secretaries, the high emirs, the spies and the couriers coming in and going out.

"—the Jaalin led by Frangi officers made camp at Um Teref . . . the British, the Egyptians, left Jebel Atshan this morning . . . Some passed around west of Shabluka Heights, they march for the river . . ."

Carver knew most of these things, but each report left him less news to offer. That was good. He would speak only of himself, and to one point.

THE room in which Abdullahi held audience had several approaches. Someone came in, clanking chains. There was a formal reading, rapid and slurred, as a proclamation whose sense all knew in advance. Then the voice of the Khalifa: "Take him, and do what is to be done!"

Carver could not see, yet he pictured what was happening; for there was not at once the sound of chains, or the accoutrements of guards going to take charge; there was silence, won by the presence of the condemned. He must surely be commanding the moment, a man who had become greater than his doom. After a deep breath, these words came: "On the day of battle, Abdullahi, you will need men like me, and you will not have the like of me, or of those others your cousins have sent to the hangman. You will call us, and we will not answer."

Carver by now knew the voice of Zeki Tummal, one of the Mahdi's best emirs, and a great fighting man to whom the Khalifa owed many a victory. Whatever this man's fault had been, real or fancied, he had spoken only the truth; he had spoken too much truth against the devouring horde of Baggara, Abdullahi's kinsmen from Darfur, and they had plotted his death to cover their own looting, and the discontent and revolt it caused.

Then chains clanked. The *ombayas* blared their deep note; and through another door, Zeki Tummal went to meet the executioner in the square. For a moment, Carver wanted to get up for one word with the stern old fighter he had known and liked. Then he knew better, for he himself had come alone, leaving all friends behind him. Zeki Tummal was going to get "the fuller knowledge;" let him alone.

There were other audiences; but at last, a major domo beckoned to Carver, who followed him through the low archway, and into the presence of him

whose lordship of the Soudan depended on the strength of the enemy concentrating at Jebel Royan; the fate of the Soudan, and Abdullahi's fate, was less than fifty miles away. Carver, stepping into the room, was thinking, "Zeki Tummal and I, we don't have so long to wait or far to go."

Abdullahi's face changed when he saw Carver. He dropped the document to which he had pretended to refer—pretended, since the man could read little more than his own name. Engaged, engrossed, perhaps worried by the truth of Zeki Tummal's farewell, he had misunderstood when they told him that next in line for audience was Simon Carver. Abdullahi's wonder was so clear that Carver said, and held out his hands, "I came because I wanted to. You see, no chain and no shackles."

"Why do you come, Father of the Scourge?"

"Because the fate of many men waits for them at Omdurman. Here is the place, and the time is near. This coming day is not Kitchener's, it is not yours, it is the day of fate, the day of judgment, and who would stay away?" Carver opened his hand, and pointed to the six coins. "My men gave me these, a clearance for whatever they owed me. They are free, and I am alone. I am alone as you are, and as Kitchener the Sirar is. For more than one, the day of payment is at hand."

HE PAUSED, and still Abdullahi did did not speak. The *qadis* and the attendants and *mulazemin* craned their necks, and seemed hardly to breath. Carver went on, "Soon after your power began, I came to work with you, because I wanted to. Our ways became one, and who was there to block our way? Until now, when there is one who rests for the final closing. I am here, to see whose is right, our way or theirs!"

This brought a gasp: to imply doubt as whose was the right path was blasphemy. But the Kahlifa asked, "Was it good, Father of the Scourge, to help a prisoner escape? He cursed that gun with an evil eye, and you helped him. It is plain that you had planned for him to leave, there was an ark waiting at the river and unlawfully."

Carver laid a coin on the edge of the couch. "Here is the tax for the building of a boat. Old powder is uncertain. I might have missed the target and hit a house, and there would have been a blood feud between me and the kinsmen of the dead. So I made myself a boat. Sandbag or not, would I risk my head for an infidel?"

"You could have stayed and told me this."

"After all these days, you accuse me. What would you have said while the dust still whirled and there were men bleeding from pieces of that gun? If the Englishman cursed the gun with his evil eye, could I have told you that it was not my fault—when I had told you how good it would be to have him there? He had brought trouble on me, and I had brought it on him: so we left together."

Abdullahi nodded understandingly, and almost with acceptance; then he frowned, saying, "You could have given him to Osman Digna's patrol at the Atbara River."

"Have you ever given up your protected? He is safe now, so I came back for reckoning:"

Abdullahi fingered his fringe of beard. "Sit here, and after prayer, eat with me. As you say, that which is written is soon to be revealed. And on the day, you will ride with me, and we both go to meet what is waiting for us. Even at Kerreri, the place of the prophecy." He extended his hand. Carver knelt to kiss it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE following day, Carver watched the darvish army march from its encampment, west of the city, to drill and maneuver on the plain. He recognized the light green standard of Ali Wad Helu, the dark green of Osman Shaykh-ad-Din, the red one of Shareef; though overshadowing them all was the great black banner which the Khalifa had inherited from the Mahdi of Allah: and this he entrusted to his brother, Yakub. These were the great flags; the smaller ones, of all colors, were beyond counting.

Carver's men, hearing that he had won his gamble with destiny, were with him again. They carried themselves with a swagger, for they served a man who shaped fate with his will and his own two hands.

Aswad pointed. *"Shuf, sahib!* There he is, that old goat, that looter, that father of trouble! Osman Digna."

Carver looked. "I'm not surprised. "And he spurred Malika, so that he was a length or more beyond his men.

As though he had felt the intent eyes of those he had almost trapped on the Atbara, the darvish emir turned his head, and recognized Carver. He wheeled his horse, as if to ride out and parley; instead he raised his arm, hailed Carver, and pivoted to rejoin his command.

"That one," said Saoud, "leaves before the vultures fly."

For a moment, Carver considered the 55,000 darvishes, horse and foot, riflemen and spearmen, who made the plain shake from their marching. "A good time to leave," he said, "but a lot of these will stay."

"There's a feud between him and us," Aswad said, uneasily. "And the Khalifa's pardon was yesterday, not today."

"I'm glad to see the old boy here," Carver answered. "He's part of what brought me here. It'll be a better judgment."

For the next few minutes he was thinking, "Be perfect now if Harrod Flint was here, and Irene had a ringside seat." And there were others—Irene's father, Dr. Marland, dead these nine years; Irene's husband, whose head doubtless had got a military funeral, leaving his body to be content with Moslem ritual. "Old Doc Marland," he reflected, "always went to bat for me . . ."

Then Aswad exclaimed, "Look, *sahib!*"

"Marouf, by God!"

Straight, deliberate, the retired man-at-arms left those who had showed him the way. Some paces from the master, he dismounted. He halted to salaam. He would have kissed the hand which Carver extended, but Carver prevented him.

"Sahib, I left following your dust, I came to see you at the Khalifa's right hand."

"You might have seen my head on a spear!"

"No, master! *Sitti* Maryam asked a sand gazer. He said that all would be well with you."

"Was it a good crossing?"

"Aywah, a fast one, and lots of water."

CARVER glanced at the sinking sun. The darvish columns, marching back to nine square miles of tents and straw huts on the rolling plain west of the city, loomed up monstrously in the dust. The sun, large and red, tinted the white *jubbas* and turbans. They marched in full confidence of victory. Whatever qualms, whatever waverings, whatever discontents they might have had, these smartly maneuvering men

had once more been electrified by the magic of old victories, and of the Black Standard. They remembered how they had wiped out the army of General Hicks, and that of Gordon, and how they had broken the British squares at Abu Klea.

Carver wheeled his mount to head for Omdurman. This had been the best sight in many a day, seeing Marouf, the first of his followers, coming to meet him.

When he stepped into the house which Abdullahi had assigned to him, a familiar veiled woman came from the back room, where she had been giving the servants and unpleasant hour. Though he was hardly surprised that Maryam had come to Omdurman, he pretended, since she clearly expected him to be.

In the court, Marouf was telling his fellows all about the desert crossing . . .

Maryam's presence in barbaric Omdurman had an effect curiously like that of hasheesh: time and space became scrambled, so that the interlude in Suakin, the urge to resume with Irene where she and Carver had left off, became an unreality. It was natural, seeing Maryam kneeling on the rammed earth floor offering him stew and dhurra porridge, and later, coffee she had brought from Suakin.

When she had laid a coal on the tobacco which filled the long stemmed *chibuk,* for Carver had always defied the darvish law against s m o k i n g, Maryam drew from her gown a document whose seal he recognized. "Take this, Father of the Scourge, it's the deed to that house in el-Kaff. I came to offer it to you. Burn it or tear it, it is all the same to me."

Carver set aside the pipe-stem, and fingered the folded papers. "What I gave, I gave."

"But when you gave me that house, you were leaving Africa to go to your own people. Now you are with Abdullahi the Khalifa, and a thing done has an end. Who am I to profit by a hasty word?"

She regarded him with eyes almost wide with earnestness, wide from a seemingly child-like simplicity. But Carver smiled a little, and shook his head. "This thing is not yet done, *sitti,* even though the Khalifa has forgiven me—tell me, did you really go to see a sand gazer, or did you have the seeing yourself?"

"Both. I looked first in a pool of ink, and then in a bowl of water. And when the sand gazer saw what I had seen, I knew surely."

HE HAD never quite understood divination by marks on sand, or by staring into a bowl of water instead of into a crystal, but he'd often suspected that this was merely a way of giving intuition a free hand: and intuition was merely the sum total of a million buried memories blended with current facts and gossip and guess. Yet Maryam had often before seen future happenings, and was not often mistaken. While he scoffed, somewhat, he also believed a little.

"The Khalifa forgave me," Carver went on, "but the thing is not yet done, it won't be until the battle. Then I'll know whether I belong to Africa or to my own tribe."

"You don't know yet?" Her glance shifted to the document he still fingered. "Why'd I bring you the deed, if you were leaving?"

"Battle is the final answer."

She frowned, twisted uneasily; this he noted with amazement.

"You ride with the Khalifa?"

"Yes."

"Is it necessary? Did he ask you to?"

"It has to be," Carver answered. "This is the twisting together of all threads, this ties the knot of thirteen years; this is the dome set upon the walls."

She understood, and it troubled her. She inched up, closer. She leaned forward, lowering her voice so that not even the walls could hear. "I have the answer. Why wait for battle? Tear up the deed, take back your house."

A redheaded woman had sent him into danger greater than any battle could offer; this one tried to keep him from the clash. He glanced at the brazier of glowing charcoal. His hands tightened. Then they relaxed, and instead of tearing the document, he unfolded it. There was of course the deed to the house; and in addition, the bill of divorce lay between the sheets.

"What I have written, I have written," he told her. "Abdullahi rides to try his fate. He and I are tied too closely together for me not to go with him."

"He will lose. As God lives, he can not win," she said, slowly, in a whisper that bit into his ear. "She, that woman, she has driven you to this."

Carver got to his feet. The glowing coals made his shadow loom up against the white wall and the ceiling. "There are more than women in this," he said, pointing to the inner door. "Go now, I have thoughts to think."

She picked up the papers, and went smoothly into the other room. Once out of his sight, Maryam said, "I wait here until you come back from battle."

"That may be a long time," he answered. "Suppose I don't come back?"

"But you will."

"A man always believes that," he agreed, "and without a sand gazer to tell him. But if I don't, then go to the Sirdar for protection. After the street fighting's over, and things are quiet. Until then, keep the door locked."

"Where are you going now?" she persisted.

"To see the Khalifa."

CHAPTER XXII

THE five great divisions of the Khalifa's army had formed, west of Omdurman, to march toward the battlefield of the prophecy, for scouts and patrols had come in, telling that Kitchener's "Turks," 26,000 strong, were advancing in mass; that Egyptian cavalry, the Camel Corps, and the 21st Lancers, fanning out from the Nile to the western hills, were combing the brush and reconnoitering the ground.

But there had been warnings closer at hand: musketry across the Nile, and the onslaught of vengeful Jaalin Irregulars, led by British officers. These had taken Halfaya, to clear the way for a battery of forty-pounder howitzers which, now emplaced at the junction of Blue Nile and White Nile, began to shell the capital.

The earth shook from the blast of lyddite shells which hammered the twelve-foot masonry of the city wall. The air shuddered from the concussion of artillery as half a dozen gunboats, steaming up the White Nile, bombarded the city. All these rumblings, however, were swallowed when the five divisions of the darvish army, untouched by enemy fire, began their march.

Rank on rank of spearmen and riflemen, horse and foot, set out across the sandy plain. It was more than four miles from Ali Wad Helu's bright green flag on the extreme left, to Shareef's red flag on the right; but largest and highest of all was at the center, the sacred black standard of the Mahdi.

El Mansura and a hundred other great drums rolled and roared; om-

bayas brayed and bellowed, while bugles shrilled through all the rumble. Carver, riding with the Khalifa's staff, somewhat behind the middle division, for the first time realized the strength of the 55,000 who went to hew down the "enemies of God."

He knew from old times why armies required drum thumping and trumpet blasts, yet he could not resist the intoxication of the barbaric and unbroken clamor. The volume, the cadence, they carried him along; he shared the wrath and the triumph of all those others who faced the great day, the day of prophecy, the day of victory. The sullen grumbling of howitzers and naval guns which silenced the Khalifa's river-batteries and chewed away at the masonry of Omdurman were only part of a greater harmony; a city was merely rock and clay. Let it be laid flat, for the reckoning would come from the thousands who shook the earth with their feet.

Far to the left, Egyptian cavalry was crossing Khor Shambat. On the right, guidons fluttered, as patrols of the 21st Lancers came out of the sand-hills near Jebel Surgham's black mass, the only break in the monotony of the sandy plain, except for the rocky ridge of the Kerreri Hills. Darvish patrols raced out from between the divisions to meet the reconnoitering enemy. A few shots were exchanged. The whip-lash smack of Lee-Metfords, the deeper voice of Remingtons: these filtered through the steady rumble of artillery on the Nile.

ALL this was drowned when the 21st Lancers swooped about, the Egyptian cavalry wheeled, and the Camel Corps counter-marched, to scramble back into, and then out of the marshy bottom of Khor Shambat, each protected by the fire of rear-guard platoons. All the noise was blotted out by the triumphant roar of the darvish army.

Far ahead, between the mass of Jebel Surgham and the more distant rim of the amphitheatre, the black ridge of Kerreri, vultures circled over the invaders as one brigade after another formed with its back to the Nile. The shadowing vultures! their omen added to darvish enthusiasms.

The patrols, failing to cut off the "enemies of God," returned to their posts, ahead of the advancing army. The shouting subsided, and again one could hear the voices of emirs as they corrected the alignment of their troops. Presently, Ali Wad Helu's 5000 had crossed Khor Shambat, and so had Shaykh-ad-din's 15,000. The center went over the edge, breaking formation as it slogged through the swamp. In the midst of this, a shout startled Carver, not by its volume but by its note. Just how it differed, he could not say, except that there was no triumph in it, and that the wrath was not such as gave strength.

He looked back, glance following the gestures of the men, and of emirs who rode with him. A puff of white smoke still hovered high and to the right of the Mahdi's tomb; but the pointed dome was no longer visible. A reddish cloud hit it, not the red of flame, but that of bricks blown to powder. Seconds later, the closely spaced concussions reached the army. Carver then understood the darvishes' dismay. The red dust, fire-colored by the sun, was an evil omen, since fire was Allah's especial weapon; and the infidel had turned it against the saint's tomb.

The red cloud thinned.

The dome still stood, but the tip of the cone had vanished. A great chunk, blown from the middle of the curve, had left a gap so large that even from a distance of six miles, the damage was

plainly visible against the blue sky.

Carver, though resisting and resentful, could not fight off the wave of depression which struck him; it was contagious, irresistible. Logic told him that even if the late Muhammad Ahmad had been a saint sent by Allah, the total destruction of his tomb would have no effect on the outcome of the battle; yet the glow, the exultation, the roaring confidence of the day had sagged.

Buglers sounded the halt. Couriers raced with orders to Ali Wad Helu on the far left. Others rode to Osman Digna, whose Hadendowas were echeloned behind the right wing, to keep any sudden move of the infidel from cutting the army off from bomb wracked Omdurman. Carver, still on the city side of Khor Shambat, watched the right wing halt instead of crossing. He squinted toward Jebel Surgham, two miles distant. Silhouetted against the sky he distinguished lancers, and a handful of mounted men. He got the mirror-flash as a signalling party shifted the heliograph which communicated with the invading army, some two miles further east. Riders disappeared below the crest. Field glasses reflected the sun as British staff officers studied the halted darvishes. Presently, others rode down from Jebel Surgham, until the rocky heap's three-hundred foot peak was deserted.

CARVER smiled sourly and said to Aswad, "One thing, we've got them guessing. You could see from every move that they were expecting us to close in. Now they don't know."

His Hadendowas crowded about him as he dismounted. Aswad asked, "You think the Khalifa was going to attack, and changed his mind because—" Rather than speak words of ill-omen, he gestured toward Omdurman.

"I don't know. Maybe he planned it this way. To tempt them to come out of their *zeriba*. They couldn't get here before four o'clock. Even if they held their own with us. There, they'd have to fight their way back to the Nile before dark, and with a good chance of being cut off."

The men grinned in anticipation. "*Inshallah,* they'll do that!"

Carver shook his head. "Kitchener's no such fool. But you can't tell, he might be another Colonel Dayton, or another General Hicks."

"That same Kitchener," Aswad said hopefully, "was Osman Digna's fool at Handub Wells, ten year ago. And when Allah has made a man foolish, that man dies without any wits. Look at the vultures settling on Kerreri."

Another spoke, before Carver could comment, and asked, "Where's Marouf? I haven't seen him today?"

Carver was glad to change the subject. He didn't want to talk about omens, the enemy's folly, or the Khalifa's plan of battle, so he answered, "Marouf stays with *Sitti* Maryam. And you others, listen. If there happens to me what can happen to any man, see that she gets to Suakin, or wherever she wants to go."

"*Aywah!* She is on our head," they answered.

Some of the gunboats which had been bombarding Omdurman now went downstream to protect the flanks of the Egyptian forces. The others remained to support the infantry guarding the forty-pounder howitzer battery on the east bank, and the encampment of victorious Jaalin Irregulars at Halfaya. This meant that the British *sirdar* still expected Abdullahi to attack by daylight.

But after an hour had passed, it became clear that the Khalifa would advance no more that day. The army, facing the enemy's *zeriba,* four miles

away, made camp. *Mulazemin* patrolled in the rear, to keep soldiers from slipping back to the city to stay with their families, or to drink the forbidden dhurra beer. Other patrols rode toward the river, to cover the right flank, for there was a persistent rumor that Kitchener would attack by night, or slip up under cover of darkness to strike at dawn, as he had at Nakheila. Then, as the sun dipped below the far off western hills, *imams* came out to lead sections and companies in prayer, for the Khalifa, who had to keep his army extended on its four-mile front, could not preach to his people.

They pitched Abdullahi's tent somewhat behind the central division, the one commanded by his brother, Yakub; and being at once prophet and king and general, Abdullahi would be busy that night. Embassies and messengers from far off Moslem princes sought him, offering or denying allegiance; some, near enough to know that the clash was imminent, wished him well.

It was several hours after dark, and well before moonrise when one of the *mulazemin* came to find Carver, saying that the Khalifa wanted to see him. Carver saddled up, and followed the man for nearly a quarter of a mile, till he got to Abdullahi's tent, which was marked by the dim light inside.

THE Khalifa sat on his sheepskin saddle pad. High emirs squatted on straw mats and small rugs. There was Osman Azrak, that fierce old man who was to lead the first wave of the assault; Yakub, commander of the center; Shaykh ad Din, of the dark green flag, and Ali Wad Helu, whose flag was bright green; Shareef, whose red banner would flutter from the ridge which sloped from Jebel Surgham toward the Nile; and finally, Osman Digna, who more than any living man knew the difference between valor and folly. All these looked at Carver when he stopped at the entrance, to salute the Khalifa.

"Sit down," Abdullahi said, "here, beside me, so all can hear you alike. Tell me somewhat of the ways of the Frangi."

This was a broad subject, and a dangerous one. Carver answered, cautiously, "It has been thirteen years since I left the Frangi to become a Moslem. Some of them do one way, some of them do another. What they do, they do, and the Power is with Allah."

"There is talk of a night attack."

"Doubtless by someone who has overheard the *sirdar* give the order?" Carver asked.

Abdullahi frowned. "No, but do the men think to ask that? What do you think?"

"The next fellow who came through the lines to say the 'Turks' were going to attack before moonrise, or after moonrise, I'd arrest him. Whether I'd slice his head off, I don't know. But I'd make sure he didn't spread such talk. It keeps the men awake, and worrying. Meanwhile, the *sirdar* wonders whether you are going to make a night attack."

Abdullahi nodded, fingering his beard, and glanced from one to another of his emirs, as if to say, "Just what I've been telling you!"

Carver carried on, "The *sirdar* made a night march at Nakheila, but it wasn't a surprise. The shooting started at sunrise. We have outposts and patrols. Whether the enemies of God do or don't attack, let the men sleep until it happens. All of which you knew, and before I knew it."

No doubt at all that they were depressed by the shelling of the Mahdi's tomb. Carver hoped that that subject wouldn't come up. Then, outside the tent, there was an outburst of voices.

Someone said, answering a half choked protest, "O thou lover of pigs, what do we care how far you've run? The Father of the Scourge is talking to the Khalifa, now shut up! The message'll keep."

Carver kept his face frozen, pretending to ignore the mention of his name, yet sudden premonition made his skin twitch as though ants crawled over him. He could not leave without permission, much less receive and consider a private message. Abdullahi had heard and understood enough to make him eye Carver, and flash a glance at the others.

They stroked their beards, and stared straight ahead. Their effort to remain noncommittal only made it clearer that they were curious, very curious to know what a runner had brought the Khalifa's foreign friend. Abdullahi got their thought; his face changed, thrice in as many seconds, and he said, "Bring him in!"

THE guards marched in a courier so fatigue-drunk and wobbling on his feet that he had not sense enough to salaam. He was slashed by thorns, caked with sweat and dirt and blood. His eyes rolled, and his dark face twitched. While he heard and saw, no impression meant anything toward him. This was so clear that they let him stagger ahead, instead of knocking him to his knees before the Khalifa. In one shaky hand, he clutched a cleft stick into which was thrust a chit, a Frangi envelope all smeared and crumpled and tattered. The long, thin man was an Ethiopian, one of those dog-faithful fellows who, given a message, stubbornly endure until they drop or deliver it.

Carver remembered one who, battered about by wars and plagues and imprisonment, took six years to get from Suakin to Cairo but in the end, he delivered what he had set out to deliver.

There was no telling how long this man had been on the march. Before the Khalifa could speak to him, he lurched forward, and sprawled on his face, twitching and muttering.

Carver sat there, as though nothing had happened.

"Take it, Father of the Scourge," Abdullahi said.

But permission was not followed by action. Without warning a blue-white blaze of light, a flare dazzling as the noonday sun, flooded the Khalifa's tent. Its intensity made the swarthy faces a sickly yellow. Eyes accustomed to the flickering flame of wicks floating in oil were blinded. The emirs cried out in terror, and exclaimed, "I take refuge from Satan!" They bounded to their feet, then stopped, groping and frightened for they had not got permission to leave.

Abdullahi, however, had set the example by bounding over the courier and toward the door. From the east came a blaze of light so strong that it lanced through the fabric of the tent. It swept the darvish line with an enfilade of brilliance. Panic, the shouts of men aroused from uneasy sleep, raced along the four mile front.

Carver shouted, "Stand fast!"

Abdullahi caught old Osman Azrak by the shoulder, demanding, "What's that? In Allah's name, what devil's business—"

The crusty emir, scarred by a score of pitched battles, quaked and twitched. "*Sidi,* the infidel are looking at us, hunting for you."

"Shut up, you old fool!" Carver shouted, and faced the blistering blaze of light. He pointed into it, saying, "They can't see you. They're five miles away. That's only a searchlight, one of the Frangi gunboats patrolling the Niles. They're afraid you're sneaking up to surprise them!"

HE COULDN'T see a thing, but he stood, facing it. He raised his voice, repeating his assurance. Panic stricken emirs quit begging Allah to protect them against the devices of Satan. He closed his eyes to shut out the glare, so that when he finally faced about, he could see those to whom he talked.

"It's nothing, it'll pass. It's five miles away, on the river!"

Voice fairly steady, the Khalifa gave orders. Emirs rode out, east and west, to still the uproar. Ali Wad Helu and the others hurried to their commands. Presently, when only the *mulazemin* guarding the Khalifa were in the tent, Carver said, *"Sidi,* if you don't believe me, move this, or leave it here and sleep somewhere else."

Abdullahi drew a deep breath. "I'll leave the tent here, but move out. You come with me, you understand these things. Have you seen the like before?"

"Many a time. But those shells they fired at the city, they are something else."

The Khalifa looked about him. The courier had got to his knees, and was muttering, "Father of the Scourge—"

The Khalifa said, "Take your letter."

Carver gave the Ethiopian a hand. He called to Aswad, who had guided the messenger, and said, "Pay him, feed him, give him whatever he needs, he's a walking dead man." Then, looking at the envelope, Carver became shaky as the man who had raced over the desert, through pelting rain and blazing sun, almost as swiftly as a camel could have covered the ground. The handwriting was blurred, and smudged, but he could make out the words, *"Simon Carver, Omdurman."*

Abdullahi was watching him. He said, "You have my permission. Open, and read."

Carver tore the envelope. The message was short: *"Flint has left town, he's joining the army as a news correspondent. I've been an awful fool, doubting you. Come tell me you forgive me. I'm waiting for you and praying. With all my love, Irene."*

This, on the eve of battle! Carver laughed, an iron laugh. He had gone to challenge destiny; he had demanded an answer, and here was one, or a part of one.

The Khalifa asked, "Is it good, Father of the Scourge?"

"It is good, *sidi."*

Then the slayer who was successor to a saint laid a hand on Carver's shoulder. "Then come sit with me, away from this tent and the devils the Frangi sent into it. We meet them at sunrise."

Carver went with Abdullah, to wait for morning and the answer.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE dawn, the Darvish army set out, drums rolling and banners flying. When, after two miles of brisk marching, the black standard was planted on a sand dune behind Jebel Surgham's rock height, Carver began to see what the Khalifa had planned; his intent was clear from the direction of each division as it swung from its original straight line.

With 17,000 picked men, Abdullahi remained in reserve, where he could survey the entire field, and watch each general carry out his orders. Seeing the long lines, black against the sunrise beyond the Nile, Carver knew that to stand and wait would be harder than to go with the assault; for Abdullahi was risking all that he had, and the outcome was now in the hands of his people.

The British *zeriba* was a thin, dark line. The dunes of Um Matragan, and

the volcanic rocks of Kerrari Ridge smouldered from sunrise. Far to the left, Ali Wad Helu was making for the cover of Kerreri, to lurk and await his turn; on the near side, Shaykh-ad-Din's 15,000 men moved for a blow at the right flank of the *zeriba*. But all this was for the future, so Carver gave it no more than a single glance of understanding, for what gripped his attention was the frontal assault: grim old Osman Azrak was leading 15,000 darvishes straight for the center of the crescent's outward bulge.

They moved across barren ground whose slight slope made it half-bowl, at whose bottom the enemy waited: an open arena perhaps two miles wide, rimmed on the south by Jebel Surgham, and on the north by the Kerreri hills. There was no cover, no shelter, except a few shallow gullies carved by the rains.

Carver wanted to yell at the Khalifa, "Stop them, try something else, it can't be done!" The 6,000 who swarmed up over the southern shoulder of Jebel Surgham, perhaps they likewise had no chance, yet they were not so nakedly exposed, without a fold or dip to give them cover. Carver held his breath, and squinted into the growing glare.

"All they need is a stone wall to be backed against," he told himself, and got comfort from the unreality of the spectacle: for distance made the densely packed darvishes seem puppets, rather than men. They merged into a blurr, a single tight mass from which scores of flags fluttered cheerily; the lanceheads twinkled and bobbed and danced.

A HEAVY concussion jarred him. Smoke drifted in dense clouds. He heard the express train rush of shells overhead. Darvish artillery had opened the battle.

The red burst and the smoke clouds were in front of the enemy *zeriba*, doing no harm at all, though doubtless encouraging Osman Azrak's men, and those of Shareef, who were now silhouetted against the long slope of Jebel Surgham.

Carver said aloud, "Poor bastards! At least they don't know what they're bucking!"

He wondered whether Abdullahi knew, and was knowingly sacrificing them, as a general had to, or whether the man at the black standard would have an awakening.

Another rumble of darvish artillery. The devotees marching into the bare arena fired their rifles, defiantly, exultantly, and to no purpose, for the range was too long for the Remingtons. Black powder smoke left a blue blanket. Then clouds of dust rose from the southern, the upstream flank of the *zeriba*. For seconds, Carver could not tell what had been fired; but whatever it was, there had been a lot of it, to have such a muzzle blast.

White puffs blossomed over the shoulder of Jebel Surgham. White puffs, and red flame. A wind seemed to sway the forest of white flags. The line of white *jubbas* wavered, sagged, tightened.

Artillery, opening fire at 2800 yards, was raking Shareef's line, tearing it to pieces. Artillery blasted Osman Azrak's tight packed thousands, who still advanced, shoulder to shoulder. Dust began to kick up in spurts. The jets of powdered clay marched up the gentle slope to meet the darvishes. The sound, first like rain patter and then like thunder, artillery and the ripping blasts of musketry, the stutter of machine guns, reached out to the sand hill, where Carver and the Khalifa could hear.

The darvish line moved on, but left debris behind it, bundles of white,

sprawled here and there, some still, and others struggling to get up. Some did get up, some did grab fallen flagstaff, rifle, or spear, to stagger after their comrades. But now the artillery, which had the range of every ridge and fold, was joined by gunboats which enfiladed the shattered darvish right. Whoever survived to carry on won only a more certain chance of being cut down.

They were so far away now that they were a mass, not individual men; yet Carver could see how the once straight line kinked and buckled. It jerked and broke, it stretched, leaving gaps. The fallen lay in heaps, so that despite the distance, he could mark the ruin.

Eight hundred yards — six hundred yards—

What remained of Osman Azrak's 15,000 plodded on, riflemen firing on the march, spearmen holding their weapons. Only a quarter of a mile more, and they could close in, hand to hand.

A touch on the elbow made Carver jerk as though hot iron had jabbed him. He whirled. Aswad offered him field glasses. *"Shuf, sahib,"* he said, and left without explaining where he had been plundering or pilfering.

Carver levelled the binoculars. He let out a long breath. Osman Azrak's division was gone. Their punishment had ended, and so had the ordeal of Shareef's thousands. Riflemen, flat on ground that offered no cover, had no longer any spearmen to support, yet they blazed away, vainly; a few could have retreated, but they would not. Here and there, men with swords and banners had begun to run—*forward!*

AND there was a horseman, one whose beard fluttered in the wind. He carried the division standard. He looked back, as though to rally the survivors. Carver, though he could not recognize the face, was sure that this was Osman Azrak, that ferocious fighter. The horse went down. The rider rolled. He got up. He flung the banner aside. He drew the long sword out of the scabbard slung from his shoulder, and he charged.

Other groups got up to follow. Machine guns mowed them down. There was no longer any food for artillery. But that one man with the sword darted on. And on. And on—

Until he jerked, spun, and crumpled. His blade made a gleaming arc in the sunrise, and lost itself in the gravel.

"That was Osman Azrak," Carver told himself, and turned his back. A few, here and there, were picking their way back to the reserve division, but these were not enough for counting.

Carver came down from his observation post to rejoin the Khalifa. Abdullahi looked tired, but he was calm. He lowered the brass telescope with which "Chinese" Gordon had once observed the enemy. "Over there," he was saying to his emirs, as he pointed toward the Kerreri Hills, "they've punished the enemies of God!"

For the first time, Carver noticed the smoke, and the movement. Shaykh ad Din and Ali Wad Helu, trying to take the northern flank of the *zeriba*, had run afoul of Egyptian cavalry and Camel Corps; they had given them a lacing, driving them back. The darvishes would have cut them off, but for the gunboats which steamed up to break the menace with shell fire.

"The boats saved the Turks," Abdullahi was saying. "Shaykh ad Din isn't hurt enough to count, the infidels ran and he couldn't catch them."

The staff agreed, and not merely out of tact, for the Khalifa was right. He went on, "Now when they come out of their *zeriba* to march on Omdurman,

we'll fall on them, and Shaykh ad Din will take them from the rear. Or if they come out to swing north against Shaykh ad Din—" He turned to his brother, Yakub, "You take them from the rear."

Despite the terrific losses of the first assault, the Khalifa had 20,000 men itching for a definite clash, and another 17,000 who were fresh, sheltered and entirely concealed from the Enemies of God. With these, he could do a great deal.

Patrols and scouts came in from the Nile-ward slopes of Jebel Surgham. The Enemies of God were going to march on Omdurman. Lancers were forming outside the crescent shape barrier of thorns, Frangi lancers, not Egyptian cavalry. Abdullahi listened to all, giving each that winning smile, that sympathetic nod; here in the field, there was no obeissance, no kneeling no kissing of hands.

IT WAS just eight o'clock. Carver had lived years, watching Arabs and black men die. Now he had a moment to think of Irene's note. He did not want to answer her call until he had seen the day to its finish.

"When Akbar," he mused, "used to wonder if Allah hated him, he went on foot into the arena at Delhi to fight tigers. He challenged Allah to destroy him or to give him victory and a new chance."

A runner came from Surgham's southern slope. "Emir Daoud," he reported to the Khalifa, "he's got only 700 footmen, hidden in a *khor*. The regiment of Lancers is just over the north crest. They're making for him, they're going toward Omdurman."

The Khalifa glanced about him. Yakub was maneuvering the picked 17,000. Other chieftains were forming with him. The Khalifa caught Carver's eye, and smiled amiably. "You know this ground. They—" He pointed to a solid mass of Hadendowas, 2000 strong, all infantry except for a handful of horsemen. "They don't know the lay of the land. Guide them, and cut off the Frangi Lancers."

Carver looked toward the now distant black standard. Abdullahi read the unspoken question. "No, my friend, it is not my right to go with them. My brother goes in my place. Hurry now, Father of the Scourge, and Allah guide you! Yea, from here and to Suakin."

As he went to the Hadendowa emir to show him the way, Carver pieced together all the scraps and impressions he had gained during the lull. The 21st Lancers were reconnoitering, then heading for Omdurman, their route along a line parallel to the Nile, and a mile from it. Kitchener's army, however, could not follow the lancers. To do so would expose its flank to Yakub's 17,000 picked men of the Black Flag Division; and they'd have Osman Shaykh ad Din and Ali Wad Helu at their rear. They couldn't possibly be ignorant enough of the darvish forces to court destruction. They could surely not have become drunk from killing without having been scratched.

So, they'd have to march west, up the slopes now littered with the dead and wounded of Osman Azrak's suicide charge, to face Yakub on their left, and a larger force on their right.

All this came to Carver as he set out of what seemed to be an unbroken, gently billowing expanse of earth, patches of gravel, occasional clumps of thorn brush. Actually, it was deceptive and treacherous ground, slashed by *khors* which were not visible until one came within a few paces of the brink.

"Keep down," he signalled, and dismounted. "Pass the word back! Keep

down so you won't be sky-lined!"

The emir repeated the directions: "Yea, keep down, so we surprise the Enemies of God, the eaters of dung!"

THE column coiled and twisted for perhaps a quarter of a mile. Carver could hear the jingle of accoutrements, the clang of shod hooves against the rock of Surgham Hill. He signalled, "Halt!"

The wind brought him the scent of horses, of leather, of tobacco. A patrol was galloping, but away. Had they continued in the opposite direction for only a few hundred yards, the lancers would have seen Carver and the Hadendowas. Then, from the distance, he heard the long drawn out commands of officers, and the preparatory commands of noncoms. The regiment, which had dismounted to await the report of a patrol, was again in the saddle.

A bugle sounded, *"Line of squadrons!"*

Ten minutes later, *"Column of troops!"*

Carver said to the emir, "They spotted Daoud's seven hundred."

By now the Hadendowas were in the depth of the *khor*, safe from observation. They raced along, silently. Above them, on the rim nearest the Nile, Daoud's infantry was lined up, boldly exposed, and in solid rank. Their Remingtons blazed. Dense clouds hid them. Meanwhile, the two thousand Hadendowa, swinging from column to line, scrambled up the steep side of the *khor*.

Bugles brayed. "Right front into line!" And then, "Charge!"

But as they wheeled beautifully into line, a regiment of lancers swinging to face musketry that had caught them from the flank, four hundred and twenty trained horsemen charging twice their number of infantry who would not run, they saw the surprise which Abdullahi had prepared for them.

Not seven hundred, but two thousand and seven hundred spearmen and riflemen stood to face them; and now only three hundred yards away. The line was so long that despite its depth, rank on rank, it formed an enveloping crescent. Whether they wanted to or not, they had to charge. They were too near to wheel into column, for the raggedest of darvish musketry would mow them down. They leaned forward in the saddle, they lowered their lances. The line swept for the gully.

Infantry, stubborn and unshaken, faced the charge of cavalry that had to and would go through. This was something which soldiers had discussed, something which experts had treated in books; but it was something which had never before been seen in modern warfare. Until now, infantry either fled at the last moment, to be hewn down easily—or, the cavalry wavered, and was shot down. Here, one stood firm as a rock, and the other drove on, gaining momentum, booting and spurring to win the very last bit that horseflesh could give, for nothing but impact could carry them through. And through they had to go, or be dragged from the saddle, to be hewn to pieces, or speared by men who had a chance—unlike old Osman Azrak—to prove their valor.

"Mashallah!" the emir at Carver's side gasped. "God has been good to us!"

They were so near now that Carver, though behind the line, could see the colonel; empty handed; pistol in holster, sabre in scabbard, leading the line. Like Abdullahi, he was too busy commanding to think of striking or defending himself.

Three hundred yards at an ever increasing gallop; time flew fast as the sparks struck from the rocky earth, yet those seconds dragged, so that Carver

had more than time to see everything. Even as he said to his own Hadendowa guard, "Stand fast, be ready to spear them in the melee," he was looking along the swooping line of lancers, picking out faces. Some, for no reason at all, stood out; others did not exist except as blurs.

One, a second lieutenant, a boy little over twenty; pudgy, ruddy, squatty in the saddle, and busy seeing everything. Another lean and wiry and sharp faced; he had a revolver, and—

It could be Harrod Flint, riding into action as a news correspondent. Another instant would have given certainty, but that next sliver of time was reserved for the crash of horse against the twelve-man depth of infantry that would not budge.

CHAPTER XXIV

CARVER, looking back to that instant, could never remember what had happened. Something had been cut from the reel of time. Time, instead of being continuous, was a succession of pieces; and one fragment was missing, because there were no sensations to mark its existence. Carver ceased seeing the man who might be Harrod Flint. Then he saw a boiling and a whirling, he heard a shouting and a blasting, a rumbling and thundering. Horses, over a hundred of them, had fallen. Darvish bodies, a human wall, had halted the swoop of a regiment, leaving that regiment for a moment paralyzed.

Dazed infantry and dazed cavalry presently regained power of action. The *khor* began to swirl as though from flood water, a slow sluggish flood. The frightful tangle coagulated into many groups, each with a lancer or two beset by a swarm of darvishes.

Lancers groggy on horse; lancers badly wounded and reeling in the saddle; lancers untouched, and struggling to get clear, to pick up speed, to ride through, and to rally on the further side. Darvishes plied long swords and heavy-bladed spears; darvishes slashed reins, hamstrung horse, seized riders by the legs to drag them from the saddle.

Slash—shoot—parry—but once out of the saddle, there was nothing but vengeful darvish steel. The lancers afoot, hacking their way out of one group, staggering until another beset them.

Carver was unaware of his revolver's recoil until the lack of it told him his weapon was empty. A man in khaki, struggling to his feet, fired at him with a carbine. Another drew a revolver. Aswad, blood dripping spear in hand, came up with a salvaged Webley. "Take, *sahib!*" he gasped.

Once again, Carver thought he saw Harrod Flint. He yelled, fired, almost aimlessly, to make the man turn. This was not tending to business. A lancer, winning clear, booted his horse. The beast leaped, knocking Carver sprawling.

One glimpse of Flint, and beyond any doubt.

Then Carver clawed earth and thorns. A spear flashed. He got his pistol again. The only lancers left now were dead, hewn and stabbed. The others were all on the further rim, except for a heroic few who had lagged to carry wounded comrades from the melee.

With a yell, Carver bounded for where he had seen Flint. He found two dead horses, three riddled lancers, an officer whose wheezing and gurgling was almost at an end: but not Flint.

Bugles brayed. The remnant of the 21st Lancers formed.

Beyond them, a line of wounded, some walking, some carrying those who

could not walk, skirted the *khor*. The darvishes formed. They too were shaken and still numb from shock. They had thrust and hacked, shot and stabbed automatically, driven by will rather than sense. Now they were cooling and uncertain.

THE Lancers, rallying, formed a column of troops which headed for the Nile, then swung to parallel the river. There, dismounting, they deployed in a line perpendicular to the *khor*. The darvish infantry, first disappointed by the escape of the enemy, now changed its tune, for the Enemies of God were getting their carbines into action, enfilading the gully.

The emir lost no time getting his men into line, so that in a few minutes, the enemies once more faced each other, each right angled to the original front.

"Keep those spearmen down!" Carver yelled to the emir. "Let the riflemen take it!"

But they ignored him. Where the riflemen, making the most of the old fashioned Remingtons, should have peppered the line of dismounted Lancers until spearmen could charge home with some chance of coming to grips, they went together, all zeal and no method. Lee-Metford carbines, loaded in clips of five, broke the darvish wave, broke it a second, and a third time. Carver, hearing the *pop-pop-pop* of small bore, high velocity bullets smacking the air over his head, wondered what Osman Azrak and his devotees must have heard during the final mile of their fatal charge against a *zeriba* defended by more than twelve thousand magazine loading rifles.

So the darvish line fell back, still further back, until it had won space to turn and run for the shelter of Surgham's southern ridge. The Lancers were glad to let it go at that.

Nine-thirty: three hours of battle. Then, from shelter, Carver saw what the dip of the ground had thus far kept him from seeing: Yakub was charging over the slope which had eaten Osman Azrak's wave at sunrise. Far to the north, Ali Wad Helu and Shaykh ad Din were closing in.

The Enemies of God, calling the battle done, had begun the march on Omdurman: and now the Khalifa's reserves rushed to hold them, while the Darvishes at Kerreri Hills caught them from the flank, turned it, nailed them from the rear.

As he watched this attempt, Carver learned how strangely time can trick a man: where, during the moments before the Lancers struck, time had stood still, it now raced crazily. Everything was out of gear.

Yakub had moved too quickly and too soon. His distant support, hampered by broken ground, was too far away.

Once more, artillery came into play. Shells riddled the darvish wave which rolled down from the sandhills. Troops of Bagarra horse, the Khalifa's own clansmen, rather than fall back, raced on, to be mowed down by stuttering machine guns, and the disciplined volleys of magazine rifles. The only difference was that Yakub did not have to go so far in order to have his great force, the backbone of the darvish army, slashed to ribbons. It became a rout, rather than an extermination, for the fire was so effective that only the cream of that hard fighting horde had the heart to face it.

Yakub was down. The black standard of the Mahdi was down.

British brigades advanced on Surgham Hill, just as, three hours earlier, darvish divisions had cleared it in the opposite direction. Then the men from Kerreri, the last untouched part of the

darvish army, and twenty thousand strong, came within striking distance.

WHAT followed was like the moves of an expertly played game of checkers. The brigades which had moved west to crumple Yakub's shattered forces now swung about, at the double. Regiments crossed the paths of regiments. From a distance, it seemed that a ballet was in action, each battalion a dancer. When the men from Kerreri, horse and foot, rifle and spear, came to close in, they faced a line, instead of the flank of one.

Carver knew what would happen. He knew without watching. Valor could not outwit time; by luck, by skill, by British precision, Kitchener after first blasting Yakub, now had only the third and last heroic wave to cut down.

There was no longer anything to keep Carver on the field. He was so near Lyttleton's brigade that he and his handful might any moment be picked out and riddled. The British lines astraddle of Surgham Hill had halted, for the remnants of Yakub's army was in full flight.

Shaykh-ad-Din's charge had broken. It was debris, a scrambling mass that had no more striking power. It rolled back. Carver turned for a final look. Through his glasses he could recognize the shapes and postures of Baggara horsemen. They could, but they would not leave. Though they could not marshal the broken ranks for another charge, one thing they still could do, and this they did. Spears levelled, riding straight as had the Lancers, the Khalifa's clansmen rode for the solid line. Maxims chewed them down. Finally only two riders remained. These two pressed on toward the waiting enemy. A horse tumbled, rolled; two riders pitched to the ground. One darvish mount, saddle emptied, dashed through the line, and halted.

Carver saw this, and then felt the note folded in his belt. He had come to challenge fate. Now he wondered what he had proved. Heading south, he saw the plain swarming with darvishes. The badly battered 21st Lancers were setting out to keep the fugitives from getting to Omdurman to man the wall; which for all the bombardment it had faced, was still a strong barrier.

As he and his men rode for the city, he wondered how Abdullahi had fared. He wondered if the Khalifa, after seeing for the first time what modern musketry and artillery could do to troops in open country, had purely as a pretext sent him to guide reinforcements to meet the 21st Lancer, and so keep him well away from Yakub's disastrous charge.

He answered his men, saying, "The Frangi won't get to Omdurman for a couple hours. We'll find *Sitti* Maryam and get out!"

What he did not tell them was that he intended to find Abdullahi; for since his fate and the Khalifa's had been so tightly twisted together, he had to find out whether, like Osman Digna, Abdullahi would or could come back to fight again.

CHAPTER XXV

IT WAS eleven o'clock when Carver turned his back on the battlefield of the prophecy, and on the ten thousand dead who littered the sun baked clay. There must have been a like number of wounded, hobbling, crawling, dragging themselves through the brush to get to the Nile, where they could drink and live, or else die without thirst. Some, who had fled early and had dropped on the way, called to Carver. To these, he gave his goatskin

jug of water. His men gave their canteens. To the others, they said, "God will satisfy your thirst."

Carver had whipped many thousand of slaves across the deadly desert: but seeing the debris left by "liberation" of a Soudan which had fought heroically against "liberty", he learned at last how to harden his heart. This was when he said, "There is no more! You crawl because you have to, and we ride because we have to, and Allah will provide!"

Then he noted a man who rode alone, on a cream color jenny. There were no patches on his jubba. The garment had been turned inside out to hide the damning badge of the faith: for there was no such thing as a uniform among darvishes. Except for the silver hafted daggers in his belt, he was unarmed. Then, coming nearer, Carver learned what he had suspected from a distance, for the posture of the man and his shape were familiar.

Carver gestured to his men, and rode forward alone. "O Friend of God!" he called. "The peace upon you! Is it good to ride without your guards?"

The rider drew in the red halter cord which served as a rein. He straightened a little, and looked at Carver; it was Abdullahi the Khalifa. He answered, "It is good, Father of the Scourge." Then, pointing westward toward the hills and the brush, "I have still an army, maybe thirty thousand, though Allah is the knower. The Frangi chase them, but is there anyone who always catches what he chases? While they ride down the tail, the head will come around to Omdurman to do what is to be done."

He spoke with matter of fact confidence. Sweat and dust and blood caked him, though he had not been wounded. He was tired, tired as no man whom Carver had ever seen, for he carried on his shoulders the grief of an army. Though the black standard of the Mahdi again fluttered, infidels now carried it. They had found it where Yakub, valiant to the last, had fallen dead across the staff.

Carver dismounted and offered the reins. "Take and ride Malika. For a thousand years, her race has carried kings into battle."

Abdullahi smiled. "Yea, and from battle, faster than the victors could ride! I and Osman Digna—" He shook his head. "It would not look good to my people if I rode such a horse."

But he went with Carver and the camel men across Khor Shambat, and into the sprawling suburbs of Omdurman. All the inhabitants had fled, expecting general massacre when the invaders arrived.

ALREADY, dusty and sweaty darvishes in thorn slashed jubbas straggled into Omdurman from the west. The first of the fugitives had completed the curve of their flight and were returning to defend the walled city. Residents were barring their doors. Others were packing up bundles and hurrying south to get out of town. Looters roamed about, looking for shops whose fronts could be smashed, or houses whose walls had crumbled under bombardment. It was now nearly noon. While the handful of Lancers and Egyptian cavalry persisted in their futile pursuit of survivors who solidly outnumbered the entire invasion force, the victorious sirdar and his British brigades were resting at Khor Shambat. They drank the liquid mud and called it good. An hour, two hours would pass before such a large body of troops could march through the outskirts and to the heart of Omdurman, for the further they went into the tangle of alleys and mud houses, with

each step a possible ambuscade, the slower they would have to go.

All this became clear to Carver before he reached the plaza, and the Mahdi's tomb, which was hemmed in with fragments blasted from the dome. Through rents in the wall, one could see the brass railing about the slab over the grave of him whom the darvishes called the holiest saint in all Islam, the one next to and perhaps equal to the Prophet.

A gunboat still shelled the city, Howitzers across the river still fired. But bombardment, now no more than a token, was continued only because some staff officer had forgot to order it to stop. One corner of the Khalifa's house had been flattened. The rest was untouched, despite its nearness to that conspicuous landmark, the Mahdi's tomb.

"Praise Allah, your house is here," Carver said. "With your permission, I go. My family waits for me."

"How? Your family? *As-safarani?*"

Carver shook his head. "No, sidi, not the 'golden-red-one'." He was hardly surprised that Abdullahi had heard of a red haired infidel woman. "But I have ridden with you. The thing is done, and if you have another battle, you'll need cartridges."

The camel men, having their orders, had filed on. Abdullahi pondered, then said, "You have my permission."

He rode across the great plaza, toward the unguarded doorway of his house. Carver resumed his own way, slowly, not trying to catch up with his men. He could feel Abdullahi's utter alone-ness, a pain and a burden as clearly as he had felt the fear which had swept the line of the advancing army when the first shell struck the Mahdi's tomb.

Flies buzzed maddeningly. There were dead men and dead beasts in the alleys and in the ruins. The tock-tock, tock-tock of the jenny's dainty hooves made a curious hollow sound in the plaza, for there had come a lull in the stricken city's mumbling. Nothing cast a shadow. The sun, directly overhead, beat down with slaying force. Carver forced himself not to think of the wounded, by the thousands, out in the sand and in the brush. He could do nothing for them, he could probably do nothing for Abdullahi, yet he felt that he should try. But he rode on.

Then the Khalifa called, "O thou friend of Allah!"

Carver halted. "Hearkening and obedience!"

THERE was now a grumbling and rumbling in the air. Someone had dutifully yanked a lanyard, wasting some more of Her Majesty's munitions. Smash another mud house, kill another donkey, or woman, or child, or—put some hopelessly injured one out of his agony.

The Khalifa, who had heard many shells, and smelled much powder in his life, beckoned to Carver, saying, "First I praise Allah, and give thanks, and pray, before I do what is to be done. Do thou guard my back."

Still a king: the old, old tradition required that when a sovereign prayed, a trusted man should stand with drawn sword to protect him. Carver spurred Malika across the square.

And then the howitzer shell, passing its high peak and swooping into its swift descent, shook the ground. The blast knocked Carver from the saddle. Fragments whined about him. Smoke blotted the entire south end of the plaza. A deep crater gaped from the ground. About it was the debris of a gateway and two houses. Malika snorted, stampeded through the s m o k e. When Carver was able to feel the earth

again, and know that he was all in one piece, Abdullahi was giving him a hand.

"It is odd," Carver said, dazedly. "If I hadn't come to guard your back—well, look where I'd been."

This was not a bit odd to Abdullahi. Everything which happened, was so only because A l l a h had especially shaped the event. So he smiled, being glad that his guard had not been blown to pieces, and went over to the tomb, the holiest spot in the land.

There he unbuckled his belt, and laid his daggers before him. He took off his sandals. Carver, lacking a sword, drew his revolver and stood somewhat to the rear and to one side, so that he could see everything, yet not directly and unfittingly look at a man who was speaking to Allah. But without seeing, he knew that Abdullahi washed his hands in the dust of the threshold: dust ceremonially cleaner than any water.

"Praise be to Allah, Lord of both worlds . . . the merciful, the generous! . . . let my ears hear no evil, nor my mouth speak any . . .

These last as he made pantomine of washing ears and mouth with dust. "Let me smell the odors of paradise . . . and my eyes see the right way . . . not the way of those who know thy wrath . . ."

And from beginning to the final *amin!* Abdullahi had asked neither victory, nor safety, nor any material welfare. This man whom so many had called tyrant, impostor, blasphemer who was the successor of a false saint, would not in the blackest hour of his life be a beggar, a whiner to Allah.

When he got up, he said, "Now I go into my house to sleep for a while. When my men come to defend the city, they'll be looking to me."

Carver spent a moment eyeing the doorway, and the breach in a wall. "I'll stand guard, you have maybe a couple of hours, and you need rest if anyone ever did."

The Khalifa shook his head. "Allah is the best guard. Go to your family."

So Carver went. Malika was waiting, just beyond the shell crater in which both she and her rider could easily hide.

Maryam, palms hennaed and eyelids darkened with coryllium, was waiting for him. "What of the battle, Father of the Scourge?"

"Allah gives victory as he pleases. We've got a few hours, then we're getting out of town. Though I hate to leave before the army arrives. Harrod Flint's with the 21st Lancers. I was knocked off my feet, just as I was ready to drop him in his tracks!"

"That man, a lancer?"

"*Aywah.* Why not? Sometimes the Frangi newspaper men put on uniform and ride into action, so they'll have better stories to tell."

"Verily, those be fools to go into battle for stories, they could invent just as good elsewhere. Probably they really go for loot. You think Flint comes looking for you?"

"If God loves him, he won't find me."

ANOTHER shell shook the quarter. The fume of lyddite filtered into the dimness of the house. Carver said, "Draw water, and cook what you can. Not too much noise, my men need sleep. So do I, but I've got to be awake before the advance guard gets too near the city wall."

Maryam considered for a moment. "You stay to hunt Harrod Flint?"

"He's a nuisance, he's the one man who can call me by my right name, and point me out, wherever I am. What'd you do?"

She did not answer, for the question required no reply, so she went about

set to work heating him a bath.

But Carver, for all his weariness, slept only a little, and restlessly. The letter from the coast made it all the more necessary for him to find and finish Harrod Flint. He rather regretted the necessity. The ancient treachery seemed no longer to matter. Perhaps Irene's letter had obliterated the past. He saw now that the illogical-seeming urge to come back to Omdurman had been blind foresight. Now that the chance to settle Flint showed its face, he accepted its necessity.

Flint, whatever he knew about Irene, would have kept her name off the records, if not out of ordinary decency, then out of deference to her status as a colonel's widow. So, with him disposed of, both Carver and Irene could start a fresh life. Omdurman had indeed given an answer.

"Abdullahi's lost his biggest battle, he's lost a quarter of Africa, he's lost his brother, his best emirs, and maybe twenty thousand of his best men, dead or else wounded and out of action for months or for keeps. But he prays, then stretches out to sleep. Me, I'm on the upgrade, and I'm twitching all over. Because I don't belong to Africa, or to el Islam."

And Maryam's serenity clinched the comparison.

CHAPTER XXVI

CARVER went to the palace to awaken the Khalifa. He said, "I heard the noise and thought it was your emirs bringing back enough of the army to man the walls, or I'd come sooner."

Abdullahi got off his *angareb,* and put on his sandals. He slung a sword to his shoulder, belted on daggers and pistols, and reached for a spear. "What is all this, my friend?" he asked as he got himself ready, quickly but without hurrying. "Allah has rested me."

Carver answered, "Let us look from the roof," said Abdullahi, who understood the evasion, led the way; and without saying a word.

From the two-storeyed annex, they looked over the city, and into the walled quarter. Several hundred darvishes were huddled, here and there, leaderless and bewildered. Others, on house tops, prepared to snipe the invaders, whose advance could now be heard: the tramp of infantry, the shrilling of fifes, the wail of bagpipes, the thump of drums. From time to time, rifles rattled: volleys to clear the approaches to the city proper.

"A few of the faithful," Abdullahi said, "and may Allah reward them and give them Paradise. But mainly looters—sons of the wild ass—*harami*—thieves and the sons of thieves, robbing each other." Then, "Not one flag. Not an emir has obeyed my orders."

Carver pointed to the wall. "Look at the holes blown into it. Worse yet, there's no banquette along it for riflemen to stand on and fire without being hit. You couldn't man that wall, they'd be shot from it like sitting birds."

"*Wallah!* that I did not think of. Can a man think of all things? Even so, these streets would eat the infidel by the thousands, if my men were here."

"They go to rally and fight in the field again, not behind walls."

"Doubtless they are wiser than I. Seeing what the cannons have done to the wall, and to the tomb, that took the heart from them. Now go your way, Father of the Scourge. Since my army has not joined me, I go to join my army."

HE SPOKE with confidence, courage, assurance; rest had renewed him. He had been right, quitting the

field. As long as he had that army which still outnumbered the invaders, he could neither have surrendered, nor yet stood as some of this emirs had stood to be shot down rather than retreat or ask quarter.

And for all the looting which put the city in an uproar, the unguarded palace had not been touched. Surely these people were not eager to be liberated from the Khalifa; the thousands dead at Kerreri had fought not at all like slaves of a tyrant.

"Where do you go, *sidi?*"

"Where Allah leads, but doubtless to the west, into Kordofan— Shirkela, or el Obeyd, though Allah is the Knower. Now I'll find myself a camel, my family has gone up the Nile to wait."

"Take one of my *hejin,*" Carver said.

"Allah will reward you."

So saying, the man went out to ride alone from his city, not far ahead of pursuit. Already, the search for him had begun . . .

Bugles sounded Citizens hurried to the market place to kiss Kitchener's boots; they carried white flags, they wore their jubbas inside out to hide the patches. They cheered mightily when interpreters translated the sirdar's proclamation.

Later, the sirdar would report how happy the people were at having been liberated. But Carver, watching from the empty palace, knew that this was only relief at being assured that whoever went about unarmed would be safe and secure; that there would be no reprisals, that only armed men would be shot on sight.

But the day wore on, and in the now shadowed streets, patrols still met snipers. Die-hards, here and there, fought it out to a finish. Weary cavalry resumed the pursuit of the Khalifa, who was to have been snared in his capital. A party of soldiers dug in the debris of the Mahdi's tomb, to get the saint's body. They took the head as a trophy to be preserved in brandy, and flung the body into the Nile. This was to show that the Mahdi of Allah was a man like other men, and no saint.

Carver was thinking, "If nothing else, this'd've convinced Irene that at the worst, I've run with people no worse than Colonel Dayton's tribe!"

He prowled, never alone, and never part of too thick a crowd. He got as close as he dared to British headquarters, to see the officers going about the business of occupying the fallen city. His only weapon was a Colt, which he kept hidden under his jubba. Dusk made him one of the hundreds of natives, hardly to be seen as an individual, whereas Harrod Flint was one of a small handful. Presently, curfew would sound.

Carver went back, deeper and deeper into Omdurman. A press correspondent might risk snooping, especially one such as Flint, who hunted bigger game than news.

Finally, he settled down to weighing his chance of success if he spent another day in Omdurman. Flint, intensely busy during the charge, could hardly have spotted Carver. "He's probably with some patrol," was a thought which had persisted from the start of the search. "Or, he is using natives for spies."

More and more, the danger of being hunted by the game he stalked impressed itself on Carver. Now that the city was "liberated," Flint could be circulating about as a Turk. He could have a dozen helpers, he could call on as many soldiers as he might need for closing in. Unless Flint had fallen in the exchange of musketry, when Lancer and darvish shot it out, afoot, after the charge, Flint surely was combing Omdurman.

CARVER'S house must by now have become the most dangerous spot in town. Better hide in a nearby ruin. . . . let the house become bait . . . someone would be telling Flint . . .

Then a familiar voice hailed him from a doorway. *"Sahib,* all is well, but that man and others, they are watching."

Aswad was speaking. Carver stepped into the vacant hovel with him to hear more. He asked, "Then they've followed you from there?"

"La, wallah! Ever since you left, Sitti Maryam told me to watch from the roof, three doors down, she'd expected this."

"You're alone?"

"Farouk and Saoud and Nuri are with me. The animals are in a warehouse, it's gutted and the roof's blown in, no one'll look there for them. We're ready to go."

"If she leaves, they'll follow her. And when they pass—"

"Sahib, they'll not pass."

Despite the *sirdar's* strict orders, the four Hadendowas were fully armed. Striking from ambush, they and Carver could cut down anything short of a platoon. This was still war; a secret agent who rode with Lancers as an incidental to getting his man was not playing: and neither could Carver afford any scruples.

"Go to the house, as though you didn't know anything, tell her I'm waiting, she'll understand. They'll figure that she didn't know the place was being watched, so they'll not suspect."

"May Allah make them witless, *sahib!* Hearkening and obedience!"

Carver busied himself with arranging the ambush. "Nuri, you stay here with me. Farouk, Saoud, cross over into the alley mouth. When they pass us, you shoot—then we'll fire. Understand?"

"Aywah!"

Carver, who had seen Osman Azrak's division mowed down without ever one chance to come to grips with the enemy, saw ambush in a new light. Twenty-four hours earlier, he could not have planned this, not even for Flint, a traitor. Now it was easy; not pleasurable, yet nothing from which to shrink. He didn't blame the British for using Maxims and lyddite against spearmen; he didn't say that since it wasn't sporting to shoot a sitting bird, it wasn't sporting to cut a man down a mile before he could use his own weapon. It was merely that having seen all those brown men laid out in windrows to dry in the sun, a few more dead were nothing to be squeamish about.

He wasn't even bothering to justify himself. No more than was Kitchener, the sirdar. Carver was merely intent, alert, nicely poised, but not keyed up. Smooth trigger finger . . . he'd recognize Maryam's perfume anywhere, even in the stenches of Omdurman . . . and whoever came after her—

THEN a fusillade lashed the silence. Half a dozen or more shots crackled. The sound came from the direction of his house. Three rifle blasts followed. A patrol answered by firing thrice; a noncom yelled. Somewhere, squawking hastily, a bugle sounded an alarm.

There'd be no ambush, neither now nor later. Carver and his three set out at a run. Unless they were in the saddle within a minute, they'd be cut down, or bottled up indefinitely. Carver ran, and he made it; and not until he was well out in the desert did he have breath for cursing that ruinous bit of gunplay and whoever had started it. As for Maryam—she could claim protection from the British, now that they were the law in Omdurman . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

CARVER and Irene sat on the flat roof of a house in Tokar oasis, some fifty miles south of Suakin, and an hour's ride from the sea. Though the sun had dipped below the black hills, its afterglow still reddened the trunks of palms, and tinged the dice-shaped houses of the nearby village: but most of all, it gave splendor to Irene's hair, and picked ruddy lights from her Persian silk robe.

"I didn't think I'd ever again relax," she murmured, dreamily, and leaned back against the cushions.

Carver, busily looking into the future, didn't answer.

She wriggled her toes shedding first one, and then the other gold brocaded mule. They dropped to the rug on which Carver sat. He picked one up, eyed it approvingly. "Shaking the dust of Africa from your feet?"

"Must you sit on the floor?"

He nodded. "Lots more comfortable. Don't worry, darling, I'll learn to eat with fork instead of fingers, it'll all come back to me, juggling hardware and napkin. After all, we've only been here a week, and there won't be any chairs aboard that Arab dhow!"

"How's it getting along?"

"Seaworthy already, though a gallon of attar of roses wouldn't hurt. And the ceiling of your cabin isn't high enough for chairs!"

"I can stand anything till we get to Obok."

"Obok. *Vive la France!*" For a moment, he regarded the gilt mules, and the deep blue, and the vermillion red of the Kurdish rug. The ground was dappled like the petals of a lily; the border, brown-black, was woven of undyed wool. He picked up a fold and said, "Maybe we ought to head for Kurdistan, where every sheep is a black sheep."

"Oh, you idiot!" Irene leaned over and rumpled his hair. "That's all gone, all done, all forgotten. And I'm glad you didn't finish Harrod Flint in Omdurman, now that the Khalifa's practically a fugitive and everyone's got a pious glow about having avenged "Chinese" Gordon, who'd be interested in chasing you to the States?"

"Mmmm . . . maybe you're right," he admitted, grudgingly. "Gun running's not extraditable, and they never did nail me in the act of herding slaves to market."

"Well, then silly! Kiss me, and look happy about our week in a private oasis, and—" She hitched over to make room for him on the edge of the lounging chair. "Do get off the rug, Simon! Just because you're dressed like an Arab doesn't make you one."

WHEN her arms finally slipped from about him, and she sank back among the cushions, Irene laughed softly, and murmured, "That's one way of coaxing you out of your outlandish habits."

"Method in my madness. You're catchin' on. So I'm going to be a permanent floor-sitter."

"Oh, no you won't! Anyway, you're really glad you didn't trap Flint, it wasn't necessary, I still think it was — well — providential that someone started that fracas and spoiled the ambush."

"If you'd had the chore of getting out of that hornet's nest, you'd sing a different song, young lady." He straightened up, frowned a little. "No, Flint isn't really worrying me, but I am uncomfortable about it. His going to Omdurman with the army was a crazy and desperate bit of business, it made me realize how badly they wanted me. All of a sudden, I knew it had to

be me or him. I'd never felt that way before, or I'd not let him off so easy in Suakin."

Irene Shuddered from remembering the flogging in the courtyard of their first rendezvous. "Don't, please, Simon! Though after all you went through in that battle, seeing those thousands cut down, I can understand how one more life wouldn't matter."

"Something like that, yes. And that persistence of his, it gets under a man's skin. Then I'd lost that battle."

"You'd lost—that's a strange thing to say."

"You'd understand if you'd seen Abdullahi after it was all over. Sure, he was a hard man, a tricky one. Even if he did have a bath tub and hot and cold running water in his palace, he was a savage. Still and all—"

"You feel guilty for having let him ride out alone. But friends were waiting for him. After all, his own people left him in the lurch when he'd counted on them to join him to defend the city, Simon, he was a munitions customer, that's all, and you had to leave him."

"Customer!" he flared. "He was an ally, we had the same grudge. And I had to leave him. Just as I had to go to Omdurman for the final untangling of him and me, to find out where I belonged, what I really was."

"Oh, I felt guilty—your going back did something to convince me I'd been wrong, all wrong—and then when I wrote you, and could do nothing more but wait and hope and pray—wasn't I a wreck when you came back!"

"Tired looking, but gorgeous. Because from the first look at you, I could see you finally believed me. Really believed."

She gazed again over the oasis and at the sullen black peaks that rimmed it. "That's why I hate to see you going back to camp, every evening. I don't want to be alone here, the minute I'm alone, I can't believe that everything is right again. I'm afraid to have you away from me—you went into terrible danger twice, just because of my qualms, and now that you're back—Simon, how *can* there be any risk here in Tokar?"

HE DREW a deep breath, shook his head, wearily. Then he told her, as he did each evening when it was time to rejoin his men in the hills, "They must by now know in Suakin that wherever you did go, it wasn't on any white man's boat. So there's a lot of wondering where you are. No matter how many veils you wore, there's everyone's guesswork, there's gossip. Lord almighty, you know that!"

"And I tell you, my men can't watch the roads closely enough after dark. Someone could sneak up and corner me in this house. By daylight, they couldn't, but daylight's about gone, so I'm riding."

"Flint *can't* guess that you left Omdurman! He has to comb and search that whole enormous huddle of huts. He must've recognized you after the charge of the lancers, or he'd not have got to the point so quickly, after the battle. And you see," she went on, triumphantly, as though she knew her logic would surely work this time, "his knowing you were fighting for the Khalifa would almost prove to him you'd gone with Abdullahi."

"All makes sense, darling, but I'm leaving, and I'll be back bright and early, after the village's been frisked for strangers."

"Oh, you're stubborn! This is the loveliest part of the day. I'm going to set a lantern in my window, you'll see it from the hills, then you'll get lonesome, and you'll wish you'd not been so silly-cautious and careful."

He laughed, and caught her under the arms, to lift her to her feet. She was still tiptoeing for another kiss when he slapped her smartly on the hip. "A kiss and a spanking, that's what you get, till you quit grumbling," he told her, and made for the stairs to the courtyard.

Since the villa was well away from the rest of the settlement, and the farmers were in their huts, there was no one to get a close look at Carver; and had there been, he'd be accepted as a kinsman of the long-absent owner. Everyone of course knew that an "Arab dignitary" had come to Tokar, and that he'd brought a woman and a few servants: but this would have no pointed meaning to anyone in the oasis. That he had dealings with the skipper of a dhow was only another bit of routine smuggling of something or other from Trinkitat to almost any other port on the Red Sea. Arab notables were constantly coming from the Soudan, or going back into the Soudan, according to the fortunes of war or trade. Yet if gossip did reach Flint in some roundabout way, that dangerous and persistent pest would surely investigate.

Carver could readily understand Irene's insistence that there wasn't any danger. Like him, she had to convince herself, over and over again, that they had evaded all the things and people which for thirteen years had kept them apart. Whatever they had said, during their days in Tokar, had always circled back to the necessity for his having gone to Omdurman, and how his leaving had made her accept, beyond doubt or reservation, that he had rescued her husband; that Colonel Dayton had died from following his own stubborn and pride-born impulse. That the man had doomed himself, right from the start, in his mania to capture Osman Digna; that fate had done all those things so that in the end, Carver and Irene would have a better start toward a new life.

GOING over all that, time and again, from the sun's rising out of Arabia to the sun's dipping down into the Soudan, was a necessary repetition: to prove, finally, that this was not a starting over again, but rather fuller realization of what had never ceased to exist.

Tokar, the gateway to reality . . .

But those thirteen fierce years still lived, so that Carver could not quite believe in his escape despite all the care and cunning he had exercised in getting in touch with Irene on his return and then arranging for her to leave Suakin, to wait in Tokar for the Arab ship which was being fitted out.

He wasn't worried about Maryam, who beyond doubt was making the most of security offered by the British occupation of Omdurman. Certainly she was not in Suakin. The men who had made the desert crossing with him gave him full assurance on that score.

Toward the end of his ride out of the bowl shaped depression and toward the volcanic rim-rock, he saw dark familiar shapes outlined against the sullen sky. His outposts, set to scan the desert routes, were coming back to camp.

Later, as he sat drinking a cup of coffee-leaf infusion, he looked down into the darkness which hid the whitewashed houses, the whitewashed cupola of a saint's tomb, the crooked little minaret of the unroofed mosque.

No lights; in Tokar, the night was made for sleep. Finally, the voice of the muezzin reached through the stillness.

"Come to prayer . . . come to prayer . . ."

Nine o'clock, and the old man doubt-

less talked to emptiness. Carver's desert men, stretched out on the hard earth, were in the borderland between wakefulness and sleep. The cooking fire sulked behind its veil of ash until the wind whisked away the gray film, when for a moment, the glow picked out the shapes of men and animals.

Irene, if she watched, could see that wavering spot of red.

They all slept now except Carver. Though Dark Egypt had at last let go of him, he hadn't got used to liberation; he still had the urge to glance warily over his shoulder. The far off call of a night-bird sent a chill up his spine: for an instant, he'd taken it, unreasonably, for the exclamation of someone nearby.

He slept, finally, but only for a while. Something awakened him so subtly that there was no identifying the impression in his senses; perhaps they were so sharp that they perceived what did not exist.

He looked down into the oasis. He saw a light, the light which could come only from Irene's window. His own uneasy hours made him say to himself, "She's been catching hell, too . . . She can't believe it's really happened to us . . ."

CARVER got up from his sheepskin rug. The Hadendowas, assured by instinct that no danger menaced the camp, were sound asleep. He saddled Malika without awakening them. For them to keep the approaches to Tokar under observation by day was only sound practice; for him to ask several of them to ride down to the villa with him that was something he could not do. Being shaky and nervous without cause, he'd betray himself to them.

The light winked out. Carver felt alone and deserted. He was glad when it shone again. Then out; and once more, shining. She was talking to him, urging him, when he needed no urging. So he rode down the trail. If his men were aware, they gave no sign.

The porter was not on duty in this cubby hole at the courtyard gate. Carver would have been amazed had he found the man there. He left Malika at the entrance and went along the wall, making for the wicket at the back, for which he had a key. The one for the front was as long as his forearm, quite too heavy to carry around.

Some moments later, he had the back entrance unlocked. He cleared the servants' quarters, which skirted the wall, and then headed for the front, to unbar the gate and let Malika into the courtyard. The moon had not yet come up. Light from Irene's second story window reached down into the garden. The bars cast shadows on the big, diamond-shaped tiles.

He was thinking, as he went silently on his way, "I'll give her a surprise."

Then, from the window, there came more than light. Carver's whimsical fond smile became mouth-gaping incredulity.

". . . *After all, I got your letter, the one you sent to Berber . . .*"

The man in Irene's room was speaking English. Before there was any answer, recognition of the voice made Carver's incredulity explode into fury. The man was Harrod Flint. What followed was obscured by the whinnying of a horse, close at hand. Malika answered, and jingled her curb chains. The other animal pawed the flagstones.

A man exclaimed, "*Mashallah!*" Another, startled, said to his companion, "By Allah, what horse is out there, what's this?"

And now Carver could distinguish the glint of accoutrements, the dark bulk of animals and men. A shape detached itself from the group. "Tell

Flint *Effendi,"* someone said, lowering his voice to a husky whisper. He was another of those fools who'd never learned how far sound travelled by night.

CARVER took long, silent strides to intercept the one who made for the house. There wasn't time for him, in his moment of dismay and rage, to figure whether it would be better or not to let them call Flint, and then nail him as he stepped out. Carver's mind was still numb from hearing the man hunter speak of Irene's letter to Berber, the British headquarters where he, Flint, had gone to join the 21st Lancers. The forwarded letter must have arrived, cutting short his search of Omdurman.

Before Carver got close enough to intercept the man, the door opened. Flint, wary desipte his advantage, must have heard Malika's answer to the horse inside the court, for he stepped from the vestibule and into the garden.

The light behind him was dim, yet it gave him a double advantage by revealing Carver's face, and at the same time blurring Carver's vision.

Flint yelled from sheer amazement. For once, he did not waste time pronouncing any formula of arrest. He went for his gun. The men beyond the patch of light grabbed their carbines. They were Egyptian constabulary, a fact which counted heavily in what came next.

Carver fired first. He couldn't be sure whether Flint dropped from being hit or simply to keep from being silhouetted in the doorway. Then the carbines whacked and blasted. Flying lead screeched, zinged, whined as it glanced from walls and tiling. A horse bolted across the garden. The constables, now flat on the ground, continued blazing away. Carver's gun made a long, ripping blast as four shots blended into each other. A man howled and dropped his carbine.

And then Carver, having leaped backward out of the light, bolted into the shadows. Flint, hit or not, was shouting orders. As he made for the wicket, Carver didn't especially care whether or not he had winged Flint; since Irene had baited the trap, trifles didn't matter anymore.

Before the men scrambling around in the courtyard fairly realized what had happened, Carver was outside and making for the hills. As he rode to camp, it became clear that there was only one destination for him. Abdullahi would be rallying somewhere west of Shirkela; and though Abdullahi could not win, he was making one more stand, because he still had men behind him, and earth on which to stand. As for Carver, he had behind him the proof that he could never cut the bond which for thirteen years had linked him to dark Egypt, and to the Khalifa; so when his men hailed him, he had an answer and a direction.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CARVER sat with the Khalifa in his tent near Om Debreikat, where he marshalled his forces. Allies were bringing dhurra and cattle to feed the army. Smugglers brought cartridges, to which slender stock Carver had added a few he'd picked up during his roundabout flight from Tokar.

"Don't tell me you're sorry you could get only a few cases, Father of the Scourge," Abdullahi said. He gestured, to indicate the encampment in the wooded plain. "We are fewer now than we once were."

"Friend of Allah, I also am not as much as I used to be," Carver said, with quiet bitterness, which the grizzled Arab recognized, and at which he

smiled with that old time friendly understanding. "So I am here, to ride with you."

"There will not be much riding. How many men did the Frangi send to Omdurman to take me?"

"Twenty six thousand men, horse, foot, and artillery," Carver answered, wondering as such a question.

"For these past weeks," Abdullahi went on, "they have been sending a colonel, Colonel Wingate, and not Kitchener, the Sirdar of Egypt. They send four thousand men, not twenty six thousand."

The Khalifa clasped his hands about the carved shaft of the spear which he carried as a scepter. His face and his posture meant, "The defense rests." Fate sat invisible in that small tent, to consider, and to render judgment. And Carver knew then that destiny also sat in judgment on him. He was glad that he had come to Om Debreikat, instead of riding to Obok, as he could have, or into Ethiopia.

He said to the man who now ruled only a small encampment, "They sent a woman finally to take me."

Abdullahi lowered his glance, for it was not proper to look at the face of a man when he spoke of such a shameful thing. Then, after a pause, "But some of your men still follow you. Allah is with the patient."

They were alone, for a man pursued by only four thousand need not hold court; he does not need a bodyguard, since only the loyal would have followed him. So, being alone, Abdullahi could say aloud that all those encamped faithful already knew: "This is the last fight. I ran from the field at Kerreri, I slipped out from my city, because there was one more fight, and who else could have led them? But this time, I do not run."

"*Inshallah,* you do not run," Carver answered, pretending to misunderstand. "They send only four thousand. These you'll cut down, and all the frightened and worried ones will come back to join you."

"They will come back, if I wipe Colonel Wingate from the field. But remember, this time I do not run. There is no place to go. So you must leave today, now. Once we join battle, it will surely be too late. Go now, and with my blessings."

CARVER saw that Abdullahi did not expect to win. He merely expected to fight, and if Allah gave him victory, then good!

"Why should I leave?"

Abdullahi answered, "Because you do not have to stay. As for me, I have to stand on my fur. For the sake of all those who fell at Kerreri, and at Gedaref, and along the way to here. That is my debt. Can I ride from here, with a dozen men, to rob caravans and steal cows and dhurra?"

Carver could not answer, "Yes."

Abdullahi went on, "You stay, or you go, what difference can a handful make?"

Carver answered, "Nothing. But they sent a woman to take me." He got up. "In the morning, I'll be with you. Not for you, but for myself."

Abdullahi made a gesture of assent.

Carver went to the little group of grass huts and the tent which his men had set up near the fringe of the darvish camp, where for some weeks, Abdullahi had prepared for the final clash.

Maryam was sitting on the angareb her servant had made by lashing branches together with thongs. She was wide awake, and eager eyed, but asked no question. That she had stayed in Omdurman, instead of going back to Cairo, or to Saukin, had not surprised him; and that she had come to the

Khalifa's encampment so soon after Carver's arrival was no cause for amazement, for she was a woman who had become a symbol of the Dark Land, and it seemed fitting that she should be at hand when Carver's fate and the Khalifa's were about to be decided.

But now he said, "It will be hard for camp followers unless Abdullahi wins. It's time for you to go."

She smiled and pointed at the bales and bundles she had packed up. "Verily, it is time. And an army breaking up becomes a hundred little packs of bandits. What lives after an army dies is to make you curse Allah for letting any escape. So, go with me till we're within sight of Omdurman. It's quite orderly there. They're rebuilding Khartoum, and the Greek merchants are back for trading."

"You came to tell me this?"

"Of course, but for the past few days, I wasn't sure."

"Now you are sure?"

"Clearly, Abdullahi will lose."

"Then go. With a few of my Hadendowas. I am staying."

"Has God stolen your wits?"

He shook his head. "Listen, woman. What is written, it is written. A man can't get out of the circle of his fate, but inside that circle, he has many choices. So I stay to try this to the limit."

"You mean it?"

"By the Lord of the Daybreak, I do! Everything that closed in on me, these past months, I made it. Should I run away from it? Abdullahi isn't running from the things he made. We both can run, but we don't want to."

She made as if to speak. She swallowed twice. She looked at him, as he sat there, head bowed. Then she got up, and with a swiftness that made her anklets jangle; though it was her voice, the cold wrath in it, which made him look up, startled. When he saw her face, he saw what he had not once in thirteen years seen.

MARYAM was beautiful as never before, since for the first time, all of her self showed in face and eyes and voice. There was nothing of her hidden except what the loose black gown concealed. And where for so long she had made him think of a sculptured Egyptian queen, she was now a living one, brought back from all the centuries, and with a scourge of serpents.

"O, thou father of many fools! You're going to stand with Abdullahi to be shot down, just because a red headed woman betrayed you? Oh, I heard it all, of course I heard it all while you talked to him. I couldn't believe you were fool enough, I couldn't believe it until I saw you sitting here, weeping without tears and without sound, putting yourself to death because she sold you to your enemy.

"Father of the Scourge? Father of idiots, that's what you are! You love her all the more for selling you out, do you? Well, then, love me—love me all the more, why don't you? She sold you out once, I sold you many a time! I'm twice times as fine as she, I've sold you oftener!"

He sat there, face motionless. Her fury rather than her words paralyzed him. She raged on, "I told those British fools in Cario about where you hid me. I made sure that your red head would find out, and hate you.

"I wrote to Asman Digna to take her husband's head, so she'd hate you forever! She sold you only once, I sold you twice, so love me, you father of many fools!"

This was not a woman, this was Egypt mocking him; and he could not move. But when she laughed, a laugh

that became a high scream in which words lost themselves, she became human again. He got up, and slashed her with the hippopotamus hide *kurbaj* which had flayed a thousand black men so that they'd suffer and live, rather than lie down to die in the desert.

The first slash of the hissing thongs knocked her from her feet. The impact left her without breath or power to move. And when neither the second, the third, nor the fourth cut made her twitch or cry out, he quit. He looked at the red tracks which crisscrossed her back; the lash had bitten her robe to shreds. Blood made the tatters cling to her back. He looked at his hand, and then at the throngs. He tossed the scourge into a corner, and smiled a little. He nodded to himself, and said, "Only one thing still to be done, in the morning."

He clapped his hands. When the Somali maid came in, he told her, "Get busy, doctor her up. Get her out of camp before the British get here. Throw that *kurbaj* into the fire. I won't need it again."

All his questions had been answered. Three strokes of the whip had justified Irene. He smiled from thinking of his father, a gentleman of Marietta, Georgia, and from knowing that he himself belonged at Abdullahi's right hand, and not back in the States. Knowing all this, he was calm, and for the first time in years, entirely right, complete and assured.

CHAPTER XXIX

AT DAWN, the drums rolled, and once more, men wearing patched jubbas refused to wait for the enemy who had come into position under cover of darkness; the darvishes charged up the slope to meet the invaders. The Khalifa's son, Soliman, was at his father's side, with Carver, and others of the staff. They had come out into the open to watch spearmen and riflemen attack the line which held the crest of the slope.

The wave of devotees broke. It sagged. It wavered, then tightened, to press on again in the face of diciplined fire. The white enemy and the black enemy held firmly. Once more, spearmen learned that they could not come to grips with trained riflemen. At Omdurman, the Camel Corps had been cut off, with nothing but gunboats on the Nile to save it; and only the most skillful of use of a difficult and dangerour maneuver in the face of the enemy, a change of front, had saved MacDonald's Corps from Osman Shaykh ad Din's flank attack, and the charge of Baggara's horse. But there, at Om Debreikat, something was lacking; something more important than numbers, more important even than those great captains, Osman Azrak and Yakub and all the others who had fallen at Omdruman.

The battle on the plain of Kerreri had been fought by men who knew they were going to win; here, there were devotees who had gone to do their best, to fight, and accept what Allah gave them. This was clear to Carver from the first.

The darvish troops, well handled, could turn the enemy's flank. The ground, seamed and slashed by gullies, offered chances for surprise movements such as had given the 21st Lancers such a savage mauling; and as he watched, Carver saw that darvish horse and foot were taking advantage of the deceptive terrain, and of the billowing smoke which blanketed the entire front. The enemy on the crest was steady, and perhaps as yet untouched, but for all his victories, he dared never forget that once the darvishes broke

through, whether from front or flank, he would need more than discipline to save the day.

Abdullahi looked through the thinning smoke and saw the dead who dotted the slope; the emirs who rallied companies of devotees, and the debris which could not be recognized. He turned to Carver and said, "The reserves are ready. Everything is ready. This time, we do not retreat. Go while you can. There is nothing left for you to do."

"The fight has barely started," Carver objected. "Wait till they come down from the crest, and we'll see."

But he knew already what would happen; he knew, and he accepted. Now that he had proved himself to be part of Africa, his place was with the Khalifa. Each had to face what he had made.

ABDULLAHI spoke to one of his aides. They brought him a black standard like the one which had been lost at Omdurman. He took his spear with both hands and drove the leaf-shaped head deep into a fissure in the ground. Then he had them lash the flagstaff to the shaft of the spear, so that the black standard would be high above the billowing smoke. He unsaddled his horse, and spread the sheepskin saddle pad on the ground at the foot of the flagstaff. There he seated himself, and folded his arms.

For a moment, his glance swept the long line of darvishes, retreating from the fire that crackled along the ridge. Emirs were rallying groups. Abdullahi smiled, spoke to his son, Soliman, and gave him a command.

The young man's face changed. Abdullahi said, "Do as I tell you, do it as I told you last night. Say to them that I am not leaving. This is what I made, and I wait for it, whether they stand, or whether they run."

"Hearkening and obedience!"

The young man mounted up, and rode for the right flank.

Abdullahi beckoned to Carver. "This line is not yet taken. Let them come out of cover, and have a turn at charging us."

He had changed: his voice rang with confidence, his gestures had power; though sitting, he had the commanding presence of a man on horse. The black standard, the most conspicuous thing along the entire line, marked the spot where Abdullahi would end, or else win a new hold. The saddle pad had become a throne.

"Father of the Scourge," he went on, "ride to the left flank, and tell them that I have given away my horse."

The logic and facts began to change their faces before Abdullahi's growing presence. The firing from the crest had subsided. Two emirs galloped to the right front, two toward the left. Others went to set out smaller flags. Abdullahi repeated, "Go, do as I say! Tell them, encourage them!"

Despite the slaughter of the first charge, there was a chance to hit the enemy from one flank or the other, perhaps from both, as they came down for an easy victory. While no one had explained this, Abdullahi's manner made anything possible. Carver galloped, and now with a purpose.

Then bugles brayed, all along the crest. Bayonets fixed, field music sounding, the British and the Egyptians came down in a solid line. Horse batteries, thus far silent, began to shell the darvish line.

Carver, now a quarter of a mile away from Abdullahi, knew that he had been tricked, hypnotized; alone and seeing the full force of the enemy, he knew that there could be no rallying; and that young Soliman, having no obliga-

tion to "stand on his fur," had been ordered to save himself.

Yet Carver did his best. He joined the hard pressed emir on the left, and shouted, "The Khalifa's standing fast! Pull these fellows into shape! Hit from the flank — make for that gulley—enfilade them!"

They tightened. The retreat stopped. But the change of front was not achieved. Machine guns blocked it. Hopelessness and panic finished the move. The emir fell with his flag. The survivors fled.

CARVER'S determination to stand had broken under Abdullahi's magnetism. Now there was no going back to join him, nor could he a second time build up his resolution to share the Khalifa's fate. Thus far, he had escaped unscratched. His horse was wounded. A burst of Maxims cut the beast down. Carver was thrown, rolling among rocks and thorns. Bullets popped overhead. They sang and screeched and whined as they glanced from stones. He got up, bleeding from flesh wounds. He looked back, and could just distinguish the man who still sat at the foot of the black standard.

Others, a dozen or more, had come to sit with him. Companies of darvishes, instead of falling back to the Khalifa's line, were laying down their weapons. They raised their hands, and shouted *"Aman! Aman!"*

They got quarter. Other groups, encouraged, laid down their arms, though along the entire front, there were some who stood fast, firing to the last cartridge. There were parties which, despairing or impatient, flung aside their rifles, drew swords, and charged at the advancing enemy. These were mowed down by riflemen firing on the march.

Another slug drilled Carver. He was divided between pain and laughter and light headedness when he got up, pistol in hand.

"Can't stand on my fur . . . God damn it, no flag to stick in the ground . . . should've brought the old *kurbaj* . . . why'd a slave herder be conceited enough to think he had to stand to a finish . . . when was I ever in Abdullahi's class . . . I didn't rank sitting there beside him . . ." He stumbled, he fired twice, dropping a soldier both times. "So he sent me away . . . sent his son away too . . . fooled me completely, the foxy—!"

The Egyptian line was straggling now. Victory had broken its orderly formation. The entire field of Om Debreikat had become a confusion of smoke, of uniformed soldiers, of surrendering darvishes, of fighting darvishes, of running darvishes who would neither lay down their arms, nor stand for a finish. And Carver, crawling, stumbling, giddy, wove in and out, making first toward the flank then toward the crest, then back again.

He was in the clear, somehow. The firing, though it had not yet ceased, was ragged. Bugles sounded, commands rang, there was shouting; but the issue was settled. He looked back. The black flag still waved. Musketry whacked, steel gleamed in the sunrise. Abdullahi wasn't surrendering, and he hadn't dropped.

"But I'm clear, and what for—"

He thought of the thousands of wounded who had crawled through the sun blasted brush at Omdruman . . . well, I'm better off than they, I'm just nicked and leaking. . . .

Then he saw other debris on the fringe of the battle; a man in khaki, and a woman wearing a tattered gown. They were staggering, stumbling. She helped him, he helped her. She saw Carver, and pointed.

IT WAS Maryam, bringing Harrod Flint to arrest him before he could escape. Carver laughed. He knew that he would live long enough to settle this one detail. He straightened up. There were still two shells in his Colt. He'd found chances to reload, several times.

Flint got to his knees. The shooting tapered off. The battle was far away now. Riderless horses galloped crazily along the front. Bugles called, "Cease firing!" The black standard was down at last.

Carver held his pistol close to his hip, so it wouldn't waver. Flint did not even try to draw. He was gray lipped, and bloody, and covered with dirt. Maryam was in equally bad case.

"I arrest you, in Her Majesty's name," Flint said.

Carver lowered his weapon. "Damn fool trick, Harrod. You could have waited. She fooled you too?"

Maryam said, "I told him we could go around."

"Still a fool trick."

"Daresay it was. Perfectly safe. Our own men did this. Wild shooting, you know. I was quite safe. Idiots, had half the Soudan to hit, and had to pour a volley into us."

Carver began to understand. "You figured you'd got it too bad for you to get back to your lines, so you had to keep on coming?"

"That's right. Easier going ahead, nearer than going back." He coughed, slumped, tried to sit up, but could not, not until Carver supported him. Then Flint said, shakily, "Under arrest—but I won't be bringing you in—you'd better give Maryam a hand. She's not hit so bad."

But Maryam sat there, her back turned to Carver. She struck aside his hand when he tried to touch her. Flint went on, "I told you I'd catch up with you. Better go ahead by yourself and surrender. Really be best for you."

"Why?"

"You've survived a last stand. This is all there is, there is no more for Abdullahi. Surrender, and go the right way, Simon. You can get a pardon. News correspondent was a prisoner. When they liberated him, he told about you and Colonel Dayton. That testament—written on sheepskin—I found it—easy to find—tracing back—I'm—the only witness who counts—and—I won't be counting—for long—"

Carver gave him a drink from his goatskin canteen.

Flint went on, "Maryam talked to me. Glad you know I didn't—ah—sell you out—" He extended his hand. "Frightful misunderstanding—but this now, this is still—line of duty."

Carver took the hand. "Christ, what a mess! Buck up, I can get you to your lines. One way or another—and I'll surrender."

"Don't want to move. Nice, meeting old friends. Listen, Simon. Irene didn't trap you. She was quite innocent. Sorry, but I had to use her."

"Oh. But I heard you say—you got her letter."

FLINT choked, wiped his lips, then smiled. I did get her letter. She wrote you two letters. One runner went to Berber to—uh—mingle with army, follow to Omdurman, find you. Other runner direct to Omdurman—find you—but intelligence arrested one. Thought he was a spy—I saved him,—well—and got the letter—so—when I missed you—in Omdurman—hah! When you missed me—I knew where you'd turn up—easy—tracing you two—to Tokar—"

Flint's time had dwindled from minutes to moments. Carver had to know one thing more: "Maryam wanted you

to arrest me, to keep me clear of Irene, or—to get even for that flogging I gave her?"

Flint's eyes closed. His breathing became hoarse. He smiled a little, and said, "Irene—all for you—nearly—shot me—when you left—red headed devil—"

And that was all Flint said. Carver looked about him. Maryam was hobbling toward the victors. Why, he didn't know; he would not ever know. He was sure only of one thing about her: that she had made her last play, and had relinquished her hold. An accidental volley of British musketry had killed her final chance.

Carver looked at Flint for a moment, whose dead lips still smiled a little. "Stubborn son of a devil," he muttered, and closed the staring eyes. He blinked, and gulped, thinking of how glad Harrod Flint had been on hearing that he, Carver, knew at last who had designed all the treachery in Cairo. Then he saw the darvish horse straying through the brush. He'd ride, he'd beter ride, before Maryam's Egyptian talents created a new bond.

Carver looked back at his old friend. He let out a deep sigh, and shook his head. "Too bad, Harrod, but I'm not surrendering. Not unless Irene insists . . ."

Abdullahi, sitting there to be cut down, had in his way surrendered; and in the wisdom of one about to die, Abdullahi had ordered Carver away from that path. So, as he mounted some dead emir's war horse, and painfully kept himself in the saddle, he was sure that of the two wisdoms, he'd accept neither Flint's, nor Abdullahi's. Irene's would be best; instead of surrender either to Fate, or to the Law, they'd carry on, starting a new fight, back in the States. He'd have to learn how to sit in chairs, and how to eat with a fork; and she'd have her work, putting up with him.

He was well in the clear now. He knew he'd make it. And he said to himself, "Even got an African precedent for doing it this way. Look at old Osman Digna . . . wonder if I'll meet him on the way to the coast . . ."

FLYING FREEZERS

THERE are going to be a lot of planes for sale once this war is won and they will be put to many different uses.

One of the most novel uses yet proposed is that advanced by a firm that freezes fruits and vegetables. The present method is to transport the quick-freezing equipment to the place where the crop is being harvested and freeze it on the spot. The main problem is to get the crop frozen at once so that all the natural goodness is preserved which requires a lot of power.

Their plan is very simple and should work. They plan to use large cargo planes and converted bombers that have been equipped with racks to carry the fruits and vegetables immediately after picking to an altitude of 15,000 feet where the air is much colder than that produced in our commercial freezers. Air ducts would then be opened in the food compartments, and the air would freeze the food in a short time. After the proper length of time, the air ducts would be closed and the plane would land or else fly the food to any desired point.—*Lee Owens.*

DAYLIGHT DARKNESS

ONE of the hazards of night operations has been the inability of the pilots and other crew members to accustom themselves immediately to "seeing" in the dark. The usual procedure was for the pilot to spend half an hour in a dark room to get his eyes used to the dark otherwise he began his flight "blind."

The Medical Research Section of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics has perfected a new type plastic polaroid goggle that will permit the pilot to remain in a well lighted room and still get his eyes accustomed to the dark. The lenses used are of a special type containing a red filter between two layers of plastic. They permit only a small amount of light to stimulate that part of the retina used for seeing in the dark. Thus it becomes adapted to seeing in the dark just as if the pilot were really in a dark room, yet the goggles allow the rest of the eye to see normally. In this way the precious half hour before the flight is not wasted, but the pilot can go about his duties and still prepare his eyes for night flying.—*Sandy Miller.*

He crouched there silent as death . . .

By

Alexander Blade

No matter what the stakes, death plays to win—and when the game looks like a draw, death wins in an even trade! One of two lovely women had to lose. Which?

I WENT up to the tenth floor of the *Republique* hotel and knocked at suite 1041. The door was painted a creamy white, the knob looked gold-plated, the corridor was wide enough for a parade. The carpeting was an off-shade of tan and walking on it was like hiking over a soft sponge.

Everything looked like money, which was the way it was supposed to look.

A house boy opened the door. He was a native Brazilian dressed very cutely in a white mess jacket with brass buttons. His skin was the color of cocoa and that made his teeth look even whiter. He was showing me a lot of teeth now with a polite, inquiring smile. "I want to see Major Porter," I said.

"If you please, one moment," he said.

He closed the door and I lit a cigarette. A cigarette with black tobacco and brown paper. That was one of the reasons I was seeing Major Porter. I don't like Brazilian cigarettes. It was all a question of economics, but I hoped to be able to afford American cigarettes after I talked to the major.

The house boy came back and opened the door wide.

"If you please, come in," he said.

I went into a room that was almost big enough for a tennis match. There was more thick carpeting, a high ceiling with nymphs painted on it and a great deal of cool looking furniture. One side of the room was all window, a huge, gleaming window that afforded a million dollar view of the harbor and bay. From that height the harbor looked clean and picturesque. From the view I generally got of it, it was just a harbor, not very picturesque, not very clean, smelling strongly of fish and rotting wood and bilge.

In front of this window there was a breakfast table, with a white linen tablecloth and a vase of red flowers. There was a man sitting at the table, a balding, fat man, with a red face, small blue eyes and a strong hard nose that jutted from his face like a rock in calm lagoon. He was eating a breakfast of eggs, fried peppers and raw oysters. It didn't look good to me, but he was enjoying it.

He picked up a glass of water, took a long swallow, then looked at me.

"Ah!" That was all he said. I didn't know what it was supposed to mean. He took a napkin from his knees, patted his lips gently, then pointed to a chair at the opposite side of the table.

"Won't you sit down?"

I sat down and he went on eating. It was probably one of the things he did well. He ate like he'd been on a starvation diet for months.

I watched him for a while and then I said, "I understand you need a man, major."

He stopped eating and looked at me, lips parted, an expression of surprise on his face. "Bloody mind reader you must be. How'd you know that?"

"You told the clerk at the gun smith's shop you needed a man for the trip you're making. He told me about it, so here I am. No trick at all."

"Quite so, quite so," he muttered. "I did tell the bounder about it, didn't I? But I don't know your name, don't know a thing about you."

"The name is McCann. Bill McCann."

He looked me over carefully as if the name made me important. I don't know whether he liked what he saw. I'm big and my face is just a face. I knew my white suit looked like I'd been sleeping in it. Which I had. But his face didn't tell me much. He just looked at me and then went back to spearing oysters from the big bowl at his elbow.

"Tell me about yourself, McCann," he said.

"What do you want to know?"

"The usual rubbish. Who you are, where you've been, why you want this job. That sort of thing."

"Okay. I'm twenty-eight. I want the job because I'm broke. I put in four years in the army. Before that I bummed around. Before that I went to college. Before that prep school. Before that—"

HE WAVED a hand and smiled. "That's far enough, old man. I don't care about your childhood. But tell me a little about your army experience. And amplify that bumming around a little. That sounds interesting."

"The army wasn't much. I was a

captain in artillery. Put in two years in Europe, got shot at occasionally, and did some shooting back. I can handle any gun from a twenty-five caliber revolver to a two hundred and forty millimeter cannon. The b u m m i n g around will disappoint you. I worked as a guide in Maine for a while, ran a gas station and took a trip to China to see if what they said about the women was true. It wasn't, so I came back."

He had finished eating now. He pushed the plate away with a sigh and lit a thin cigar. He slumped down a little in his chair and folded his hands over his plump stomach. The cigar he worked to one side of his mouth and pointed toward the ceiling.

"Very interesting background, eh? Well I don't know but what you should do nicely. I'm going into the interior. Poking around for some shrunken heads. Heard all sorts of stories about the specimens from this part of the world. Sort of a hobby of mine. Not very cheerful, eh?"

I shrugged. "Some people collect stamps. Not much difference, is there?"

"Quite so," he smiled. "Not much difference at that. I need a man to act as sort of a bodyguard. That's the word in America, isn't it? I don't know what I may run into, and a cool head and a steady shot are handy things to have around."

He talked like a stage Englishman. I didn't mind. He could talk like a Zulu if he paid me. "Are you planning on needing a good shot?" I asked.

"Never can tell in this blasted game," he said cheerfully. "It's going to be a small party. Just eight or ten of us."

"How about money?" I said.

He frowned a little and pinched his nose. I hoped he wasn't going to be a haggler. Because I wasn't in a position to haggle back.

"I intend to be gone two weeks. Let's say five hundred dollars and any expenses that come up. If we're gone longer than two weeks we'll work out some adjustment."

That sounded wonderful and I said so. And I said, "How about an advance now." It didn't bother me at all to let him know I was broke. There was a time when I had some pride. But you can't drink it, eat it, or make love to it, so I dropped it somewhere.

"Of course," he said, as if he were embarrassed for not mentioning it himself. He took out a wallet and counted out twenty-five crisp British pounds. He shoved them in my direction with a smile. "This should do it," he said.

A girl came into the room while I was putting the money in my pocket. She was tall, with good square shoulders, shoulder-length blonde hair and lean features. She was deeply tanned and it made her eyes look startlingly blue. I suddenly wished I had combed my hair. That would be the way she'd make most guys feel. There was something about her, arrogance or superiority maybe, that made me feel defensive.

SHE was wearing a white silk shirt, white gabardine slacks with a crease that looked sharp enough to draw blood and platform sandals. Her toenails were painted red.

She looked at me briefly, then turned to the major.

"Is this the man?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear. This is Mr. McCann. He is accompanying us on our trip."

She looked back at me, more carefully this time. She didn't miss much. I could almost hear her mind ticking sharply over all the points. I needed a shave, my eyes were probably bloodshot, and my suit was filthy, and I could tell from her expression that she was noting all that and filing it away.

I began to get irritated. "Well, do I pass?" I said.

"The major apparently thinks you do," she said. Her voice was what I expected. Cool, remote, without much human quality at all. She held out her hand suddenly. "I'm Cynthia Porter, the major's niece."

I stood up and shook hands with her. I didn't know what to say, so I kept quiet.

"I suggest you get straightened out before we leave," she said. "A few good nights' sleep won't hurt you, and get some decent clothes. For the trip, I mean. You're not too prepossessing now."

"I don't get many complaints," I said.

"Your company isn't discriminating, I imagine," she said.

I felt my face getting hot. I'd have enjoyed wringing her neck, but the twenty-five pounds paid for a lot.

"Okay," I said, "I'll have a flower in my lapel the next time." I smiled so I wouldn't sound like I was talking back.

She didn't smile. She turned back to the major. She was through with me. I had been spanked and that was that.

"I'm going down to the beach," she said. "I'll be back for lunch."

She walked out of the room, managing to look graceful in spite of the platform soles. The slacks did a lot of interesting things to her thighs and hips, but I wasn't interested. Not that way, at least. The only things those hips suggested to me was how badly the adjoining area needed a good spanking.

The major said, "Cynthia is really a remarkable girl. High-spirited, y'know."

"Yeah, I know," I said. "She's coming along, I gather."

"Yes. Of course. Couldn't go without her. Well, come back in tomorrow, McCann. There's quite a little work to do getting ready for our trip. Lots of things to talk over."

"Okay," I said. "See you at the same time."

I left him then, looking wistfully at his empty plate. Outside, I headed for a bar.

CHAPTER II

I HAD two drinks, then bought a bottle of rum, two packs of American cigarettes and went back to my room. My room had a fine, earthy view of the dock. Nothing like the major's. I could hear the sailors swearing and smell the bilge. There was no extra charge for these advantages.

The room was larger than a telephone booth by a few square feet and had a bed, a table, a chair and a woven grass rug that was faded and dirty.

I took my coat off, put the bottle and a glass on a table within reach and stretched out on the bed. I poured myself a nice drink, lit a cigarette and closed my eyes.

There was a fly buzzing around the room and I wondered what kick it got out of bumping into the walls and doing outside loops. Probably it was looking for something. Another fly, probably. I started thinking about myself then, which is something I don't enjoy.

I wondered what I was doing in Brazil, drinking cheap rum and acting like a character out of a B movie. My background when I finished college had been completely normal. I should have gone to work then in a brokerage house, or a bank, and after a few years married one of the girls in my set, and by this time have a family, a home, a membership in the country club and spend Saturday nights playing bridge and drinking Martinis with the crowd I'd grown up with and known all my life.

That's what I should have done. Maybe I wouldn't be happy but I'd be normal. Instead I'd hit the road, wandering here and there and somewhere along the line I'd picked up the habit of drinking to make things look better.

Now I was heading for the beach. In another six months I'd be panhandling drinks from American tourists. That was a nice prospect.

I poured another drink to get my mind off that idea. There was a knock on the door a little later.

I said, "Come in."

The door opened and a girl I knew as Marie stood there looking down at me. Marie was a native, a slim, clean girl with rather wide cheekbones, dark hair, soft brown eyes and a surprisingly white skin. I didn't know what she did for a living. She wasn't a prostitute, and she wasn't a gilded lily, either. Her room was about a block from mine and I saw her occasionally in the little bars along the street. She didn't drink much, and she generally seemed rather grave and a little sad.

She said now, "Can I come in?"

"You practically are," I said. "Have a seat, a drink, a cigarette and anything else you want. The orchestra won't be here until later, but you can help me watch the flies while you wait."

That wasn't supposed to be smart. The rum was talking. And not making much sense.

She closed the door and pulled the one straight backed chair closer to the bed and sat down. She was wearing a white dress with a red sash with nothing underneath. A red rose was stuck in her hair. It looked a little pathetic. She had sandals on her bare feet. Her legs were really excellent. Slim, white, with just enough muscle at the calves to make them shapely. She looked clean and dressed up, as if she had gotten ready for some special occasion.

SHE was looking at me very gravely.

"Why do you drink so much, Billy?"

That was so corny I had to grin. That was all I needed. A native girl to worry about my downfall.

"The next thing," I said, "is to tell me I could make something out of myself if I'd stop drinking and go to work. Then I see the light, marry the little girl who's waited for me, and the curtain comes down as we walk hand-in-hand into the setting sun, virtuous as hell."

"I don't understand," she said. Her forehead was twisted in a puzzled frown.

"Okay," I sighed. "We'll change the script. I'll play it straight. I drink because I enjoy it. That's why we do most of the things we do. Now what can I do for you? Or did you come here for the WCTU?"

She didn't get that. And she ignored it.

"I came here to ask you a favor, Billy. You are going on a trip into the interior, yes?"

That made us even. It was my turn to look surprised.

"Maybe," I said. "Why?"

"I know you are going," she said. "I know you are going with Major Porter."

"How'd you learn all that?"

"The house boy of the major's is a friend of mine."

"You mean the little guy with the brass buttons?"

"Yes."

"And he told you I'd been there to see the major about a job. And that I got the job?"

"Yes, he told me all that."

"That's fine," I said. I really didn't know what difference it made, but I didn't like it. I poured myself another drink. I offered her one, but she re-

fused. That was just as well. There weren't any more glasses.

"Go on," I said. "This is interesting. "Why do you care where I'm going?"

"I want to go with you," she said.

"Great," I said.

"You will take me?" she cried. She was very excited now.

"I will not take you," I said. "Get that idea right out of your head. I'm not the boss on this party. I'm just a hired hand. I don't even know why they're taking me. But even if I was the big shot the answer would still be no."

"But why? I can cook, I could be helpful. I would cause no bother."

"It's out," I said. "I haven't got a thing to say about it anyway. If you want to go ask Major Porter. I can't do anything for you."

"You could go to the major for me."

"Yes, and I could buy a ticket home, or start diving for pearls, but I'm not going to. Why the hell do you want to go with us?"

"My brother is in the interior," she said. "He has been there several months now. I am worried about him. He may be in trouble."

"So you're going to find him? I never heard of anything sillier. The interior is quite a big place. It's not like a room where you look in the closet and then under the bed if you want to find someone. It's thousands of square miles."

"The major is going to the same neighborhood where my brother went. That I know."

"Did Buttons tell you that, too?"

"Yes."

"He knows more than I do then. Everybody knows more than I do. Even if the major is going to the same place the chances are slim you'd find your brother. Anyway you're not going along so why talk about it."

SHE got up and sat on the edge of the bed. She looked like she was ready to cry. She put a hand on my shoulder and then leaned forward and kissed me on the lips. Her mouth was soft and warm.

I put my arm about her shoulder and pulled her down beside me.

"I will do anything for you," she said. "Just help me."

The room was warm and I could hear the fly buzzing, doing his outside loops and bumping into the walls. It was the only sound I could hear.

Her hair was pressed against my lips, and in the circle of my arm, her body was soft and warm and clean.

"I'm not that kind of a heel yet," I said. "You're nice, but I can't help you, so it's out. Thanks, but it's no deal."

"But I like you. Why won't you let me like you?"

"Because I'm an idealist," I said. "I'm a fine, upstanding young man, and I've got to play bridge tonight with some people I've known all my life. They'd be shocked if I did anything Horatio Alger didn't sanction. Besides I want a drink."

I pushed her back to a sitting position and reached for the bottle. My hand was trembling a little and some of the rum splashed on the floor.

She stood up and watched me while I had the drink. I thought she was going to say something, but she shrugged her shoulders and started for the door.

"I'm sorry," I said.

She turned and looked at me for a moment and then went out the door.

I lay there waiting for my heart to slow down. Then I lit another cigarette and listened for the fly. But it had flown away.

CHAPTER III

THE next day I saw the major. I had cleaned myself up and I guess I looked all right. Cynthia, at least, didn't make any comment when I walked into their suite.

She was sitting on a low couch, wearing a red flared skirt and a white blouse, with fancy, puffed-up shoulders. She glanced at me and then went back to the magazine she was reading.

The major was sitting at the window again, nibbling shrimp from a bowl beside him and looking at a map. He gave me a big smile and held out his hand.

"Ah!" he said. "Delighted to see you again."

We talked about the trip for about an hour. We were taking a plane to a village some three or four hundred miles west of Rio. There we'd meet the bearers, the guide, pick up provisions and head into the interior. We weren't going very far. About a hundred miles in, which with good weather, we should make in a week. We would leave in about four or five days.

I spent the afternoon getting a few things I needed. Boots, breeches, some khaki shirts. I had an army forty-five so I got a hundred rounds of ammunition. I also bought an extra canteen, which I intended to fill with rum. I made a little list of the money I spent to turn in to the major.

I spent the rest of the week on the beach, lying in the sun and swimming. I laid off the bottle. I knew this trip was going to be tough, and I wanted to get back into reasonable shape. I succeeded in getting some of the red out of my eyes and back into my cheeks and my wind improved a lot. The last day I swam out a mile, floated out there in the nice cool water for about an hour and then came back in, using a slow crawl that was faster than it looked.

I felt all right when I came out of the water. Not as good as I used to, but still pretty good. I was using one of the public stretches of beach, about eight miles from the city. The tourists stayed down at the big hotel beaches, so I had it all to myself.

Almost, that is. There was a shiny car parked at the top of the strip, and I saw a shining blonde head behind the wheel. I walked up that way, drying myself as I went, and when I got closer I recognized Cynthia Porter.

The car was an eight cylindered convertible, with a lot of fancy chromium accessories and red leather upholstery. She looked like she belonged in that kind of car. Her hair was parted in the middle today and drawn black into a bun at the nape of her neck. Her light blue eyes had a quizzical look as she watched me.

"Can I give you a lift back to town?" she asked.

"Sure. I didn't expect to see you down here. Do you enjoy slumming?"

"Hop in," she said. She didn't seem annoyed. "I was looking for you as a matter of fact."

I CLIMBED in beside her and she backed the car around, then swung out to the road. "I was curious how you were spending your time," she said.

"I'm a very good boy," I said. "I swim all day, have a malted milk at night and go to bed."

"We're leaving tomorrow morning," she said. "Meet us at the hotel about eight. We'll go right out to the airport."

"Okay," I said.

We drove along in silence for a while, then she looked over at me and smiled.

"There's no point in our not being friends," she said. "I was a perfect little bitch the first time I met you. I'm sorry for that. We'll be together

a lot the next few weeks, so we may as well make up our minds to get along."

Suits me," I said. I was puzzled. She sounded completely out of character. Making gracious overtures wasn't her line.

"I'm glad you agree," she said. She kept her eyes on the road for a while and we didn't talk. Then she said, in a cool, even voice, "There's going to be trouble on this trip. I may need you."

That sounded more like her. She wanted something from me, and was asking for it without any embarrassment.

"I'll be around," I said. "I'm getting paid as a bodyguard. If anything happens just blow your scout whistle and I'll come running."

"Do you have a gun?" she asked.

"Yes."

She didn't say anything else for the rest of the ride. She dropped me at my room, said goodbye, and was gone. I went upstairs and thought quite a while about our conversation.

CHAPTER IV

THE plane trip was uneventful. We made our destination in about four hours. The village where we met the rest of the party was just a scattered collection of buildings on the fringe of the jungle. There was a crummy hotel, a general store that made a living for its owner outfitting expeditions, and a few bars.

The major and I spent the afternoon talking to the chief porter, a big, silent native, whose name was Sam. Everything was in order, the burros had been loaded, and we had water, quinine, food, sleeping tents, flares, compasses, all the necessities.

We left early the next morning, before it got too hot. We planned to travel until about eleven, then knock off for the afternoon, and get in a few more hours before dark. There were ten of us in the party. The major, Cynthia, Sam, six bearers and myself.

The bearers were small, nondescript natives. They wore shirts and trousers, with floppy straw hats and no shoes. Their loads weren't heavy; most of the supplies were on the four burros. Their work was pitching tents, cooking, and taking care of the campfires.

That day we made twenty miles. The trail we followed was comparatively smooth and we ran into no trouble. The mosquitoes were bad, but not too bad.

That night we pitched camp near a small stream, and by the time the tents were up and supper cooked, the moon was out, making the jungle something beautiful and mysterious.

Cynthia had walked all day, and I'd found myself changing my opinion of her. She walked with a free swinging stride and she was in as good a shape as I was, when we finally stopped. She could have ridden one of the burros but she didn't. She had a tough streak in her I hadn't suspected.

The major was bushed and he crawled into his tent as soon as he'd stuffed himself with enough food for the entire party. Cynthia and I sat for a while by the fire, without talking. Finally she said good night and went into her tent.

I was tired but not sleepy. I filled my pipe again and sat looking into the fire, not thinking of anything in particular.

The bearers had one big tent on the opposite side of the clearing.

I saw someone moving behind their tent and I stood up and walked over there. I had no idea who it was, and I had no reason to be suspicious. Actually I was just curious.

I walked behind the tent and saw one

of the bearers dragging a piece of matting toward a clump of underbrush.

"Hey!" I said.

The bearer turned suddenly and crouched close to the ground.

"What's the idea?" I said.

The bearer didn't answer. I walked a step closer, took hold of his arm and hauled him to his feet. I couldn't see his face, so I pulled the floppy straw hat off his head.

There was enough illumination from the firelight for me to see a pair of large brown eyes, a pale skin and black shoulder-length hair.

I didn't say anything for a minute. I was too surprised.

"Please," she said, "I am not causing trouble. I will work hard—"

"Oh, nuts," I said. "What the hell did you do a fool thing like this for?"

MARIE looked down at the ground. She didn't answer.

"Are you on the level about looking for your brother?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said. "I must find him."

"This is fine," I said. "How'd you manage to get this far?"

"I knew one of the bearers. I left Rio after I talked to you. I came here and he said he would help me." She looked at the tent where the bearers slept, then looked down miserably at the matting at her feet. "I can't sleep in there with them. But I can sleep outside and no one will know."

"The mosquitoes will," I said. "They'll send out patrols and then dive bombers. You won't be here in the morning. They'll take everything but your fillings."

I took a firm grip on her arm. "Come with me, little one. We're going to see the major."

"Oh, please," she cried. "Don't do that to me."

"Stop yelling," I said. "He can't very well send you back now. But I've got to let him know you're along."

I dragged her across the clearing and woke up the major. He stuck his head out of the tent, looking bleary-eyed and nervous.

"I say, what's all the racket?"

"Stowaway," I said. I pointed to Marie. "She smuggled herself into the party."

The major blinked at her. "What the deuce!" he muttered.

"We're stuck with her," I said. "Can't very well turn her loose out here. And we can't spare a man to take her back to the village."

"Quite so," he said. He scratched his bald head and looked at the ground. "What do you suggest?"

"Take her with us. Put her to work to pay her way. We can use her as a cook. That's about all we can do."

"Very well," he said. He seemed anxious to have it settled. "Good suggestion." His head disappeared.

Marie clung to my arm as I went back to the bearer's tent.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"Don't thank me," I said. I tried to sound ferocious. "You'll work until you drop for the next two weeks. I'll see to that. And it's just what you deserve."

She made a noise that sounded like a giggle. I glared at her but her face was so perfectly solemn that I had to smile myself.

I woke up two of the bearers, told them to fix her some kind of place to sleep. They looked astonished, but I imagine they knew she was along all the time.

I went to bed myself, then.

WE MADE good time for the next four days. On the night of our fifth day out the major told me we were close enough now to pitch a semi-per-

manent camp. I was happy about that. The heat had been getting worse, and I was just about whipped. The major had been riding one of the burros for the past three days, and he looked like a beat-up Buddha as he jogged along the trail. Cynthia had held up better than either of us.

She wore shorts, boots, a tan shirt and helmet, and I never saw her stride break once. She kept on, as if she had a set of motors inside her that kept her going.

I had noticed a new tenseness in her and the major. They had stopped two or three times the previous day to check their maps, and now they weren't talking much. Both of them seemed to be boiling with some inner excitement.

I found a fairly good camp site. A hard-packed dry clearing, fairly close to a little fresh lagoon, with plenty of fire wood close by.

After the camp was set-up and dinner was over, the major strapped on a gun, told me he'd be back in a little while, and left. I hadn't talked to Marie since the night I'd discovered she was along. She stayed with the bearers when we were on the march, and she was too busy cooking when we made camp, to have much time for anything else.

I stopped her as she was hurrying past and said hello. She seemed to be touched with the same feeling I'd noticed in the major and Cynthia.

I said, "slow down. You'll kill yourself. Is this the area you hope to find your brother?"

"Yes. This is where he is. I know it."

"I hope you do," I said.

I looked at her curiously. She had worked harder than any of us for the past week and it hadn't touched her. Her white skin seemed impervious to the sun. And even in ragged trousers and shirt she looked good.

"I must go now," she said. "There is much work."

I got up, lit my pipe and strolled out of the clearing. I headed for the lagoon. The direction I took wasn't just accidental. A half hour before I'd seen Cynthia heading that way, carrying a towel, and that had interested me. I couldn't put what she did to me into words. But there was something about her hard, arrogant shell that got under my skin.

WHEN I got to the lagoon the moon was coming up. Cynthia was in the water and the moonlight shimmered whitely on her bare shoulders.

"How's the water?" I said.

She turned toward my voice. "Fine. Coming in?"

"No, I'm a spectator tonight."

"Is the view all right?"

"There's not enough moon out yet. But I've got all night."

"I'm coming out. Do you blush easily?"

"I haven't blushed since I got caught with an extra ace in my hand. That was in second grade."

"I'm going to call your bluff," she said.

I lit my pipe again. "Come ahead."

She stood up and walked out of the water. There was something about the whole scene that caught at my throat. The moonlight, the dark background of the jungle, and her slim white body rising and coming through the green, gently moving water, was part of a racial picture a million years old.

She stopped beside me and I could see the faint smile on her face.

"You win," she said.

I picked up her towel and tossed it to her. "What's the first prize?"

"I haven't got anything with me," she said.

There was an obvious answer to that, but I let it ride. She spread the towel and sat down beside her clothes. She patted the ground beside her. "Sit here. Your pipe will keep the mosquitos away while I dress."

I sat down and she made no movement toward her clothes.

"I told you once I might need a friend," she said.

"And I told you I'd be around."

"I hope you meant it. I'm going to need you pretty soon."

"Care to tell me about it?"

"There nothing to tell yet," she said.

She looked at me and I saw her lips were parted and the moon had softened the blue of her eyes. There was no sound but the gentle wash of the water.

"Would you like to kiss me?" she said.

I leaned close enough to kiss her, very gently on the lips. She drew away from me and then lay back, her hands clasped behind her head. There was a peculiar smile on her lips. "Is that the best you've got?"

I put my pipe down beside me, I bent over her and kissed her again, this time for keeps.

When I felt for my pipe again it was cold. I lighted it and she ran her hand over my cheeks.

"You've got a nice face," she said. "The light makes it look very strong and confident."

"That's the way I feel now," I said.

She took my arm suddenly with fingers that were strong and pulled herself close to me. "Are you going to stick with me, Bill? Promise me you will?"

"All the way," I said.

CHAPTER V

THE next afternoon the major asked me to come with him to look over the area. I didn't bother to ask him where he'd been the night before. As we were leaving Cynthia came out of her tent and saw us.

"Where are you going?" she asked. She was looking at the major.

"Just to look around," he said.

"I'll come along," she said.

"No my dear, it wouldn't be wise. We'll be back shortly. Come along, McCann."

I didn't get it. But I went along. About a mile from our camp site we came to a trail which looked well-used. The major stopped.

"This leads to a village," he said. "The natives are aborigines. Very poor development. I got this far last night. But I didn't care to go in while it was dark."

Without saying anymore he started down the trail. I made sure my gun was sliding easily in the holster as I followed him. After about three hundred yards along a well packed trail we came to a clearing several hundred yards in diameter, circled by grass huts.

I heard a dog barking, and saw a few wild children playing in the middle of the clearing. The children saw us about the same time and ran screaming toward the huts. From some of the huts I saw heads peering.

"They look all right," the major said. I wasn't so sure. But he sounded confident. "I want to find the chief," he went on. "I'll have a look through some of these huts. You stay here and keep an eye on things."

He strode toward the huts on the left side of the clearing. I watched him enter the first, come out a second later and go into the next.

And about five seconds later a hoarse cry of freight sounded from the same hut. I pulled out my gun on the run. I charged through the door of the hut, came up short.

The major was backed against the far wall, an almost ludicrous expression of fear on his thick features. Facing him was a lean crouched figure, a man, wearing ragged trousers, no shirt and a bandana tied around his head. He was advancing slowly toward the major, a wicked, curved knife held in his hand.

I didn't need the gun. I grabbed his wrist and jerked him backward. I dropped the gun and slugged him hard over his heart. I felt his body twist and flinch and then he sagged toward the floor, doubled in pain. I shook his wrist until the knife fell to the floor. I kicked it to one side, then bent and picked up my gun.

I looked at the major. I didn't like the way he was handling things. I didn't like the way be barged into things he apparently didn't know a damn thing about, I didn't give a damn about him. But I was along, and still cared about myself.

"The blighter was hiding in the corner," he gasped. "Gave me quite a turn. Lucky you popped in."

I LOOKED at the man on the floor. He had lean, clean-cut features, bright black eyes. He looked like a native Brazilian. I didn't know where he fitted in, but I intended to find out.

I didn't have a chance. I was reaching for his shoulder, with the idea of jerking him up and getting some talk out of him, when a slim figure, wearing ragged trousers and a shirt, slipped between us and dropped to the ground beside him.

I swore. "Can't I ever get you out of my hair?"

Marie looked over her shoulder at me. "This is my brother, Miguel. This is he who I came to find."

"He's got lousy manners," I said.

The man on the floor raised himself painfully to one elbow. Marie chattered to him in Spanish and he answered her sullenly. I picked up enough to know she was scolding him for running away and he was telling her to mind her own business and not talk so much before the Americans.

I got tired of listening. "Tell him to come with us," I told Marie. "We'll take him back to camp." She looked fearfully at me so I said patiently, "we won't hurt him. We just want to talk to him. But he pulled a knife on the major."

She turned swiftly and let loose another barrage at Miguel. He looked sheepish and said something I couldn't get.

"He says he was frightened by the big man," Marie said. "He didn't mean to hurt him."

"Okay, okay," I said. I looked at the major. "What about it?"

"He seems all right," the major said. "Tell him to come along."

Miguel picked up his knife and put it in the waist of his trousers and then he stood up. He didn't seem dangerous, just sheepish and confused. But I decided to keep an eye on him.

WE WENT back to camp and that night the trouble broke. I turned in early. Cynthia was quiet, sitting staring into the fire with a worried look on her face, the major was busy with his own thoughts, so I said good night and went to my tent.

I was worried, myself. I didn't know why. And that was one of the reasons I was worried.

I don't know how long I was sleeping when the scream sounded. It was a hoarse, tortured scream, and as I scrambled around for my clothes I had the odd idea there had been a note of outraged surprise in it.

I crawled out of my tent. There were two or three bearers running around

and I saw Cynthia running toward the major's tent. I sprinted across the clearing, got there before her. I pushed her aside, shoved the flap back and looked in. There was enough light from the fire to let me see the whole, unpleasant scene. The major was lying under a mosquito netting and he was very dead. That was obvious at one glance.

His chest looked like someone had poured a bottle of catsup over it and there was a look of almost comic surprise on his face. But it wasn't very comic. There's nothing comic about murder.

I could see the hilt and part of the blade of the knife that had been driven into his chest. The blade was curved wickedly. It was a knife you'd remember if you saw it once.

And I'd seen it before. It was Miguel's knife.

I straightened and put my arm around Cynthia's shoulder.

"He's dead. We can't help him now."

"No," she whispered. "It can't be—"

"I'm sorry," I said. I grabbed one of the bearers. "Get Miguel. Fast."

Marie was standing by me, her eyes wide with fear. She grabbed my arm and began crying. "No, no, it wasn't Miguel."

"We'll see," I said. "It's his knife."

The bearer was back in a hurry. "Miguel is gone," he said. "His bed is empty."

I heard Marie's sobs as I led Cynthia across the clearing to her tent. I don't know what I said. The usual things, I guess. They don't help any, but someone has to say them.

SHE stopped beside her tent and drew closer to me. She had slipped a robe over her pajamas and her hair had tumbled down over her shoulders. She looked young and somehow more vulnerable than I'd ever seen her.

"You said you'd stick with me," she said. "We've got to go to the village tonight. You must come with me."

"Why? We can't do anything now."

"It must be tonight."

"I'm sorry," I said flatly. "There's been too much double-talk already. I don't know what the score is. I know the major wasn't after heads. I guessed that from the start. But I played along because I was on the payroll. But this is murder. And I'm not going along any further until I know what's what."

She pulled me closer to her. "I'll tell you then," she said. "We were after gold. The major had one map. But there was another map. Miguel found it, somehow. That's why he's here. He'd gone now, heading for the treasure, and we've got to stop him."

"You said it was gold," I reminded her.

"Yes, yes," she said impatiently. "It's a chest of bullion. You've got to help me. I don't have anyone else now."

I wanted to help her. I knew she was making a foolish move, but I still wanted to help her.

"All right. I'll get dressed. I won't be long."

As I walked back to my tent I glanced at the huddle of bearers. They were crowded together about the fire, too frightened to even talk. I did notice that Marie was missing. I didn't know what that meant. And I was in too much of a hurry to think about it.

WE MADE the village in about half an hour. There was enough moonlight to make walking easy. Cynthia was wearing a cartridge belt and revolver. She had slipped moccasins over her bare feet and in sorts and a shirt she looked like a wood nymph. The revolver was the only incongruous note.

A dog barked as we entered the clearing but there was no other sound.

Cynthia stopped, drew closer to me.

"There's a temple behind the village," she said. "That's where we must go. I'll lead the way, but please stay close."

We crossed the clearing and found a trail behind the village. We followed it for fifty yards or more until we came to the ruins of a small ancient temple, gleaming whitely in the moonlight.

The temple had been built like an amphitheater, with circular tiers of seats surrounding a broad flat altar. Time and weather had made a ruins of it. The stone had crumbled and the walls were interlined with thick fissures and cracks.

We circled the temple until we found a sagging portal that led inside. I stopped there and touched her arm.

"Do you know what you're doing?"

"Yes, yes, of course," she said. I could her breathing. It sounded ragged and tense.

We passed through a corridor and came out in the bright moonlight in the center of the temple. The altar was directly before us.

I heard a stone scrape and then, from behind the altar, a figure appeared. I caught a flash of bare shoulders, a black head adorned with a red bandana, and then a pistol shot sounded.

Cynthia must have had the gun in her hand. I hadn't seen her draw it, but it sounded twice and Miguel screamed once and staggered forward. His knees struck the altar and he pitched forward onto its smooth, worn top, and lay there, his legs working spasmodically, as if he were trying to crawl toward us.

There was no sound in the world. I could hear the scrape of his knees on the stone altar and then that stopped. He day quite still then, quite dead.

Cynthia went around the altar and I heard her draw in her breath sharply. I followed her. Behind the altar a black shaft had been dug in the ground. She was staring into its depths with a triumphant expression on her face.

"It wasn't just a wild hope," she said, more to herself than me. "It's here, at the bottom of the shaft. More gold than anyone would believe."

She turned slowly toward me, a dreaming smile on her lips.

"They thought we were crazy to spend our last money to track down a buried treasure. But we did. Only there wasn't enough gold to split two ways. That's why I killed the major."

I heard that, and it didn't register.

"You look amazed," she said. She laughed softly. "I killed him with Miguel's knife, and now I've killed Miguel. They were the only two people in the world who knew of the treasure." She looked at me and the smile touched her lips again. "But you know, don't you, my dear?"

SHE stood before me and the gun in her hand was pointed at my heart. The moonlight made a pretty picture of her. It touched her head with a golden halo and it made her bare legs look like slim, perfect columns of pure gold. She was a woman of gold. Just as cold, just as hard.

I'd seen it all along, but the feel of her body had made me forget it.

"I liked you," she murmured. "It's a pity this has to be done."

I didn't say anything. The words were all used up.

She raised the gun slightly.

A woman's voice screamed from beyond the clearing.

Cynthia wheeled, her foot struck a stone and she fell backward. She twisted frantically, but she never had a chance. She had been standing on

the brink of the dark shaft.

I saw her body disappear. I saw the moonlight on her gold hair. And I heard her scream. The scream seemed to continue for a minute, until finally it was choked off with shocking abruptness.

Marie was clinging to my arm, sobbing. I looked down at her and a lot of funny, twisted thoughts were going through my head.

I knelt there, in the bright moonlight beside that ancient altar on which Miguel's body was sprawled grotesquely, and I felt something like peace.

I couldn't explain it. I wouldn't try. My arm was around Marie's waist and I felt it belonged there. I didn't know what I'd been looking for. Or why the feel of this girl in my arms gave me the feeling I wouldn't look any more.

Something had gone out of my life with Cynthia.

I put my hand on Marie's head. This wasn't going to be bridge parties on Saturday nights, or Martinis with college friends. Maybe it wouldn't be as good as that. But it was what I wanted. I knew that much.

MISTAKES AREN'T ALWAYS ERRORS

How a "Stupid Error" Made 150 Years Ago Helps in the Selection of War Pilots Today

IN THE astronomical observatory at Greenwich, England, during the year 1796, two men were working diligently at recording the instant when a star passed across the meridian. Kinnebrook, one of these men, was the observer. Maskelyne, the other astronomer and the head of the observatory, checked Kinnebrook's readings with his own made at periodic intervals. The procedure was as follows: Kinnebrook would keep his eye on the star until it almost reached the meridian line, then, watching the clock, would record his estimate of the exact time the star crossed the line. After several of these observations and after several checks by senior observer Maskelyne, poor Kinnebrook was fired! Compared to the readings of his superior and to those of other observers in the vicinity, Kinnebrook was found to have differed so widely in his estimates that his contribution was worthless. With a shrug of his shoulders, Kinnebrook cursed his "stupid error"—the cause of his downfall—and left the observatory, forever after remaining in obscurity.

It was not until 1822 that light was thrown upon the case again. Another astronomer, somewhere in Germany, had discovered that there are considerable individual differences in the speed of reacting to such situations as those found in Maskelyne's observatory. In this publication, the scientist enumerated several other similar situations and concluded that large and persistent differences appear in recording the transit of stars.

This was the first approach to the important study of *reaction time*. But Kinnebrook, the slow-reacting assistant, never saw the day when his "stupid error" was capitalized upon.

By 1882, astronomers accepted the concept of reaction time as a significant factor in their work, and learned how to allow for the individual differences of observers.

In more recent times, apparatus has been designed to measure reaction times of people in scores of other occupations. Taxicab drivers are subjected to a test consisting of the recording and interpretation of speeds with which the candidate reacts to the flashing of lights at various intervals; each colored light is given a meaning and reactions are like those in a real traffic situation. Streetcar motormen, too, have been given tests to gauge their reaction times to sudden and irregular happenings—the apparatus checking the time taken to adjust to such situations as a child running into the vehicle's path, a sudden change in traffic lights, an oncoming automobile, or the wild escape of a wagon-horse. These situations have been presented to the candidate by light signals, as in the case of the taxicab test, or in a more novel manner, by flashing motion pictures of real street scenes upon a screen stretched in front of the motorman.

Most recently, of course, reaction time tests have seen their greatest utilization in the aviator selection programs of the armed forces. There, lights are flashed before the subject and reaction time is recorded as he lifts his finger from an electric circuit key, thus breaking the circuit. The time at which the circuit was broken is automatically recorded upon timing devices near by.

Thus, the "stupid error" made by poor Kinnebrook in 1796 was extended as a guiding factor in astronomy, later in the selection for driving and other traffic responsibilities, until today it is being used extensively in aviation cadet testing. Science and history have pardoned the luckless observatory assistant without question!

With a sudden choking gasp Tommy reeled back and slumped to the ground—and Salomey screamed

THE WITNESS

By W. W. Korte

Salomey loved Tommy, and hated Luke Hogan—but the two emotions have a lot in common; which Salomey soon discovered

TOMMY MORGAN looked at the girl beside him as they walked through the woods. "Even the birds know we're going to be married," he said. "Listen to 'em sing. Tomorrow I'll be the happiest man in the Ozarks. And," he added soberly, "the luckiest."

Salomey Turner smiled up at him, but the smile went no farther than her lips. Her eyes, soft and velvety brown as the eyes of a fawn, showed the fear that over-shadowed the happiness she should have felt.

"I hope so, Tommy," she said softly. "But I'm afraid. I can't forget that Luke Hogan swore I would never marry you."

Tommy shrugged wide shoulders. "He was just talkin'."

"I don't know." Salomey pressed closer to him. "He scares me. Yesterday, when I was hunting wild ferns, I looked around and he was standing behind me. I hadn't heard a sound."

"I know," said Tommy. "Mean and onery as Luke is, he's a real woodsman."

"He told me yesterday," Salomey went on, "that he always got what he

wanted, and he wanted me. He'll kill you, Tommy, if he gets a chance. Remember when he fought Jed Towers at the dance at Sutter's Mill? He would have killed Jed if you and the others hadn't pulled him off. I remember how he looked. He enjoyed seeing Jed helpless and bloody on the ground. He's cruel and heartless! Tommy, you've got to be careful."

Tommy stopped and leaned his rifle against a tree. "Look, honey," he said. "We came out here to hunt flowers for the wedding, not to talk about Luke Hogan. Stop worryin' about him." He put his lean, brown hands on her slim shoulders and pulled her to him. "It'll take more than a half-wild woods-runner to keep me from marryin' you."

Salomey pressed her face against his blue flannel shirt, which would soon be replaced by the khaki of the Army. Tommy put a finger under her firm, round chin and tilted her head back. His hard, young mouth came down on hers. As the sweet fire of his kiss burned through her veins, Salomey momentarily forgot her fear.

The harsh, spiteful bark of a rifle shattered the magic of the moment. Salomey heard the sickening sound of a bullet tearing into flesh. She felt Tommy's body jerk and stiffen. He sagged against her and slipped through her arms to the ground.

SALOMEY dropped to her knees beside him and cradled his head against her breast. Tommy's blue eyes that had held so much laughter were dimming fast.

"Tommy!" cried Salomey wildly. "Tommy, darling, don't die. We—" She stopped suddenly, realizing that Tommy could not hear her. Numb with shock, she crouched there on the forest floor, holding Tommy's head, and staring at her red-stained hands. "Blood on my hands," she muttered dazedly. "Tommy's blood."

A gloating voice behind her said, "I told you you'd never marry him."

Luke Hogan had appeared out of the laurel like an evil, dark-faced, forest wraith. He was a big man, bull-necked and heavy-shouldered. His rifle hung in the crook of his left arm. His heavy lips were twisted in a vicious grin. He took a long step toward her and fastened a big hand in Tommy's shirt collar. He flung the limp body aside.

The callous brutality of the act brought Salomey to life. She flung herself against Hogan's big body, and beat at his dark face with futile fists. Hogan laughed and caught her to him. "I like a woman with fire," he jeered. "I reckon I'll have to lay low for a while, but when th' excitement dies down, I'm comin' back to get you an' we'll head west."

"I'll never go anywhere with you," cried Salomey. She struggled to free herself from his arms.

"You'll go," said Hogan, "unless you want your dad to get what this—" he kicked Tommy's limp form— "—guy got."

Salomey felt trapped and helpless. "You'll hang for killing Tommy."

"I'll never be caught alive," Hogan boasted. "I'm not afraid t' die. An' I don't intend to be caught. Th' woods are my home an' th' sky is my roof. No man in th' Ozarks can get close to me when I'm in th' timber." He bent his head and kissed her with his sneering mouth.

He pushed her away so suddenly she nearly fell. "I'll be back," he promised, and then he was gone.

DURING the days after Tommy's funeral, Salomey moved mechanically about her accustomed tasks,

(Continued on page 170)

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THE WITNESS

(Continued from page 168)

living for only one thing—to hear that Hogan had been captured or killed. Men searched the timbered hills with bloodhounds, but Hogan had blotted out his trail so completely that even the dogs found no trace of him. In the timber surrounding the cabin where Salomey and Matt Turner, her widowed father, lived, keen-eyed mountain men armed with rifles lay in hiding day and night, waiting for Hogan to make good his boast to return for Salomey.

Three weeks dragged by, and then one day the sheriff drove up to the cabin. The district attorney was with him. The sheriff, a lanky, weather-beaten man in his late forties, walked up to the porch where Salomey was peeling potatoes.

"Evenin', Salomey," his voice was a soft, musical drawl. "Got some good news for you. We caught Luke Hogan this mornin'."

"Thank God," breathed Salomey. Her father came out of the cabin. "Heard what you said, sheriff," he said. "How'd you get him?"

"Just plain luck, Matt," replied the sheriff modestly. "That is, luck for me. Luke, I reckon, got over-confident. He was proud of his woodcraft, you know, and seein' that he'd had us runnin' in circles for three weeks, I guess he thought he couldn't be caught. Ever since the shooting some of us have been watchin' that old shack on Hound Ridge where Hogan kept some supplies. We were about to give it up as a bad job, but this mornin' me and one of my deputies were watchin' and at about three o'clock we saw somebody sneakin' through th' timber. We watched our chances and jumped him, and found

we had our killer. I reckon his grub was runnin' low. The son of a woods louse fought like a mountain cat, but we got him, and right now he's thinkin' things over in a cell in th' county seat."

"I'll bet," said Turner, "that the bunk in his cell is the first bed he's slept in for twenty years. Most of the time—so I've heard tell—he just rolled up in his blanket under a tree."

The sheriff nodded. "He ain't much more'n half-civilized. Just like an Injun. I've got a guard watchin' him every minute to keep him from killin' himself. I'd hate for him to cheat th' noose."

The district attorney cleared his throat. "You," he said to Salomey, "will be our star witness. Your testimony will hang Hogan. The trial will be one week from today."

"I'll be there," promised Salomey. She felt a grim satisfaction in knowing that she had the power to send Hogan to the gallows. She wondered if Hogan's bravado would hold up when the noose was fastened around his thick neck.

ON THE day of the trial the courtroom was crowded with grim-faced mountain men who had come down from the hills to see Luke Hogan's face when the judge sentenced him to hang.

Salomey sat on the hard bench beside the district attorney, her eyes fixed unwaveringly on Hogan. She noticed that his dark face was impassive, showing not the slightest sign of fear. A burly guard sat on each side of Hogan, and across the table from him sat his lawyer, fat Herman Landen.

The judge rapped for order and the buzz of voices ceased. The jury was made up of town folks. They knew nothing of Luke Hogan. All they knew was what they would hear during the

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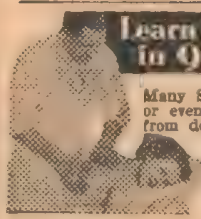

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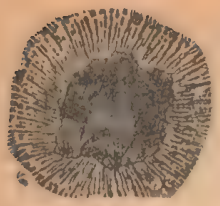

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trial. For the most part their faces showed boredom.

The district attorney touched Salomey's arm. "Remember," he said in an undertone. "The outcome of the trial will depend upon your testimony. You were an eye-witness, you know. Be sure to stress the fact that Tommy was killed from ambush without a chance for his life."

Salomey nodded silently. Her name was called and she walked over to the witness chair. "Do you," droned the clerk, "swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"I do," said Salomey steadily. She looked out over the sea of faces. Most of them were her friends and neighbors. Mechanically, she answered the routine questions of the district attorney.

"You and Tommy Morgan were planning to be married, were you not?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered softly.

"And on the day before the wedding was to take place, did the defendant, Luke Hogan, shoot and kill your fiancee from ambush?"

That was her cue, but for a long moment she did not answer. Then; "No," she said clearly.

She was conscious of the mingled surprise and dismay on the district attorney's face, and of the rising anger in the faces of her friends, but she went on, speaking slowly and clearly.

"Tommy and Luke," she said, "were quarreling over me. Tommy grabbed his rifle, and Luke shot him."

The district attorney spoke hastily. "You're upset. Perhaps you didn't understand the question."

"I understood the question," she replied. "That is how it happened."

"Very well," he said coldly. "That is all."

"If I could prove that you lied," he

said in a fierce whisper as she stepped down from the stand, "I'd try you for perjury. You deliberately lied to save Hogan's neck. He'll go to prison on a manslaughter charge instead of hanging for murder. You're in love with him," he accused.

"No," said Salomey dully. Then she added, half to herself, "Wild things can't live in cages." The district attorney looked at her as if she was out of her mind. Then comprehension dawned on his face, and he pressed her arm as she walked back to her seat.

There was a pleased smile on the fat face of Hogan's lawyer, but Hogan himself turned his head to look at Salomey, and there was burning hatred and something akin to fear in his beady eyes. *He* realized why she had lied.

Salomey knew that he had not been afraid of the hangman's noose. That was just one brief moment of agony when the trap opened under a man, and then it was all over. But surround a man like Hogan with stone walls, with guards watching his every move, let him sleep on a hard bunk in a tiny, stifling cell, and a part of him would die each day.

She felt the angry, bewildered eyes of the mountain men upon her as she sat down. They thought she had betrayed Tommy. Perhaps they would understand some day. But it made no difference whether they did or not. She knew that Tommy, wherever he was, understood; and that was all that mattered.

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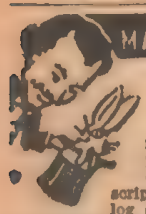

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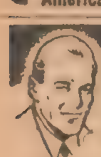

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JUNGLE NAPOLEON

(Continued from page 81)

in the extreme south, with 45 men, he set up a new nation—the Republic of Sonora—with himself as president. Reinforcements totaling 300 came to aid him.

TROUBLE soon arose over discipline. A high percentage of the adventurers were outlaws, the scum of the gold camps, and their 29-year-old leader's attempts to enforce his authority amused them. Amused them, that is, until the meek little man rose in a wrath that was terrible to see and ordered the execution of two mutineers and the punishment of others, despite the fact that the party was deep in enemy country and surrounded by hostile Indians and Mexicans.

Mass desertions left the filibuster with fewer than a hundred men, however. With this handful he determined to cut his way back to the United States. A dozen times on the thousand-mile march through the hell of sand and stone that lay between them and the States, annihilation seemed certain. Enemy forces of six and ten times their number formed against them, but the ferocity of desperation and Walker's military genius carried them through.

The expedition ended like something from Gilbert and Sullivan. The filibuster chieftain and the 33 ragged, half-starved survivors of the seven-months' march north found their passage barred by 200 Mexican horsemen drawn up in battle formation close to the United States border. From the other side of the line a regiment of American cavalry surveyed the scene, ordered there to arrest the would-be emperor and his subjects on charges of violating the neutrality laws.

Undaunted, Walker ordered his "advance guard" of nine men to charge the Mexicans. The enemy force broke ranks and fled without firing a shot, whereupon the president of the Republic of Sonora —who had been reduced to wearing one boot and one shoe—hobbled across the line with his weary army and surrendered to the cavalry. A sympathetic jury later acquitted him, though imposing fines—none of which were ever paid, incidentally —on a number of his aides.

Back in a San Francisco newspaper job, Walker proved more restless than ever. Eagerly he scanned the horizon for war-clouds to the south.

In January, 1855, his chance came. Castellon, leader of the Nicaraguan Democrats, needed fighters; they would be rewarded with high pay and land on which to settle. In return, they were to serve in the Nicaraguan army against his political rivals, the Legitimatists, who were trying to overthrow him.

Billed as "colonists liable to military duty," Walker and 56 companions set sail for Central America. Nicaragua looked good to them. Not

only rich in natural resources of all kinds, its narrow southern end was also the path across which all the world moved east and west. From San Juan del Sur on the Pacific coast, a 12-mile road connected with Virgin Bay on Lake Nicaragua. River steamers crossed the lake and made their way down the San Juan River to Greytown, on the Atlantic side. This was the Vanderbilt-controlled Transit Route. Whoever held it was in a position to levy tribute on a vast amount of trade.

But if Nicaragua was good in the eyes of William Walker, the adventurer and his men did not look quite so well to Castellon. He had counted on 300 soldiers, commanded by a military strategist. Instead, he had drawn a mild-mannered little gentleman with all the earmarks of a preacher, heading 56 swaggering outlaws in black slouch hats, bright-hued flannel shirts, and blue jeans, with navy Colts in their belts and bowie knives in their boots.

Ordered to march on the walled city of Rivas, where 1,200 men under General Bosque were entrenched, the Californians at once proved their mettle. Although deserted by a hundred native auxiliaries sent to support them, they stormed into the town in spite of barricades and batteries. Ten of Walker's officers, Colts in hand, charged and took a position defended by a hundred troops.

For three hours the unequal battle raged. Twenty-two of the soldiers-of-fortune were killed or wounded. At last, overwhelmed by superior numbers, the remainder fought their way from the town. But General Bosque's losses totalled more than 200 dead, and fear of the invaders verged on panic.

IN THE months that followed the American Falange charged its way to a reputation for invincibility. Souci, Half-Way House, and Virgin Bay fell before its onslaughts. Santos Guardiola, the Butcher of Honduras, fled from it in terror. The fortress of Granada, 18 months beseiged, went down under a single night attack.

The Legitimatists gave up. Ponciano Corral, their commander, agreed to end the war and, on October 29, 1855, less than six months after the filibusters arrived, a new government was formed.

Corral, however, was already planning a new war—this time one of intrigue. Secretly he got in touch with other Central American powers and plotted to drive Walker from Nicaragua. Learning of the Legitimatist's conniving, the little adventurer courtmartialled him on the spot for treason, despite the man's popularity throughout the country. Sixteen days after Corral first pleadged allegiance to the new government, he was executed by a firing squad in the Great Square of Granada.

The seeds of suspicion Corral had sown had taken root, however. Every Central American country was alive with the fear that William Walker—General Walker, now— and his *filibusteros* had designs on their independence.

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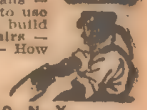

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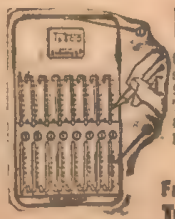

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unit, the Rifles, had a new flag: Broad blue stripes at top and bottom were divided by a white stripe double the width of the blue. On the white field flamed a scarlet, five-pointed star. Across this banner the Rifles had inscribed the slogan, "Five or None!" to indicate their goal of subjugation of the five countries then in existence into one great filibuster empire stretching from Colombia to Mexico.

That was Walker's dream. Already acknowledged by the world as King of Filibusters, he was gripped by a determination to give the phrase real meaning. Every boat from San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York brought fresh recruits. There was something about the austere little general—cold, reticent martinet though he was—that inspired such loyalty and respect as few men have ever commanded.

Soldiers-of-fortune from the four corners of the earth rallied to his banner: Charles Henningsen, who had marched with rebels in Spain, Russia, and Hungary; Bruno von Natzmer, a former Prussian cavalry officer; Frederick Ward, who was to die at Ning Po, China, in the Taiping Rebellion; Domingo de Goicouria, a Cuban revolutionist. A number of his followers, it is said, gave their lives fighting under the khedive of Egypt against the British. But most of his men, like Robert Wheat and J. E. Farnum, who were to become high Confederate officers in the Civil War, were Americans, the majority recruited from California and the south.

"Such men do not turn up in the average of every-day life," says Henningsen, "nor do I expect ever to see their like again. I was on the Confederate side in many of the bloodiest battles of the War for Southern Independence; but I aver that if, at the end of that war, I had been able to pick 5,000 of the bravest Confederate or Federal troops I ever saw, and could resurrect and pit against them 1,000 of such men as lie beneath the orange trees of Nicaragua, I feel certain that the thousand would have scattered and utterly routed the 5,000 within an hour."

They tell of one of Walker's sergeants who inherited $100,000 during the Nicaraguan campaigns. When the time came for him to leave for the States, he purposely missed the steamer and stayed to die at Granada.

The Indians gave Walker a new title, based on a legend handed down through the centuries. It told of a grey-eyed man from the north who would some day come and overturn the Spanish rule. So, when they looked into the adventurer's cold slate orbs, they renamed him the Grey-Eyed Man of Destiny, who had come to set them free.

But Costa Rica, to the south, determined to end the menace. She declared war on the filibusters and put an army in the field. Guatemala, San Salvador, and Honduras, in the north, joined her. Corral's followers in Nicaragua itself rose in revolt.

With an army which, at peak strength, numbered only 1,200, Walker took the field against the

21,000 soldiers and 10,000 Indian auxiliaries of the five allies. Up and down Central America he swept like a hurricane, apparently invincible. Always in the thick of the fight, he miraculously escaped death, though the old black coat he wore was riddled with bullets. And, as one disastrous defeat followed another, the allies were seized with a dread that their enemy would make good his boasts of conquest.

It was Walker's stubborness, his legalistic insistence that every order be carried out to the letter, that led to his downfall. Following his election as president of Nicaragua in 1856 by a suspiciously overwhelming majority, he had alienated the Negro and Indian populations by amending the constitution to permit the re-introduction of slavery, a move he believed was necessary for the country's development.

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But when an investigation showed that, through crooked bookkeeping, the firm was defrauding the Nicaraguan treasury of large amounts, the little dictator without hesitation revoked its charter and seized its river steamers, working in co-operation with a faction within the company which wished to overthrow Vanderbilt.

Vindictive and raging, the financier swore vengeance and threw all his resources into the fight against the filibusters. The Central American states were exhausted by their long war. Now a steady stream of money and munitions poured in to help them. Vanderbilt representatives counselled immediate campaigns against Walker. Even more important, American adventurers, hired by the money-master, came to aid them.

The filibusters found their supplies cut off. Fever, cholera, and musket-balls continued to thin their ranks, but no reinforcements could get in. Great Britain, fearful for her trade, took to harassing the Americans.

Under pressure from the Abolitionists—who hated Walker for his pro-slavery views—and Vanderbilt, the United States government joined in. President James Buchanan ordered the man-of-war *St Mary's* to close the Pacific coast of Nicaragua.

The Grey-Eyed Man's situation was desperate. Starvation set in at Rivas, where he was encamped, and his handful of men grew less and less able to fight. Many deserted in the vain hope of getting out of the country. Yet when Captain C. H. Davis of the *St. Mary's* demanded Walker's surrender to save further slaughter, the adventurer scornfully rejected the idea and outlined a mad plan of fighting his way through to San Juan del Sur, boarding a schooner which comprised his total navy, and sailing for a fresh stand in the

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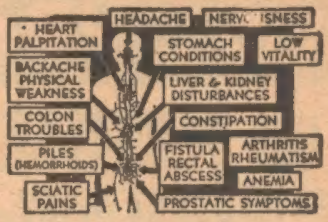

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Interned in the United States, Walker at once made plans for a return to the tropics. Destiny, he believed, still rode with him, and he was convinced that, had Captain Davis not interfered, he would have established an empire.

Three times he tried to go back. Twice he and his men were captured and returned to this country. Then, in June, 1860, the bantamweight general embarked on his last trip south. A revolution was in progress in Honduras. Landing at Trujillo on August 6, a half-hour's fighting won the town.

But Honduran troops surrounded him and a British man-of-war, the *Icarus*, anchored in the harbor and demanded the Americans' surrender. Instead, the adventurers fled through a postern gate. After a running fight they reached the Rio Negro River, where they encamped. They had made their escape from Trujillo without blankets or supplies and many were sick.

Now the *Icarus* sailed to the river's mouth and Captain Nowell Salmon came ashore again to demand Walker's surrender. Finally, with the distinct understanding that he was giving up to the British, not the Hondurans, the filibuster general handed over his sword.

But at Trujillo Captain Salmon broke the witnessed word he had given as an officer and a gentleman and, instead of delivering Walker to the United States, handed the Grey-Eyed Man over to the Hondurans.

On September 12, 1860, they marched him out at eight in the morning, a priest on either side, two officers with drawn swords preceding him, three soldiers with fixed bayonets following. In his right hand the little soldier-of-fortune carried his old slouch hat, its red ribbon faded and stained; in his left, a crucifix.

They led him to an old fortification a quarter-mile from town. There, in an angle of a crumbling wall, the priests administered extreme unction. The rites completed, ten soldiers stepped forward, rifles leveled. Walker faced them, erect and unflinching. The *commandante* gave the order to fire . . .

He was buried by the priests and American residents of Trujillo, and his body lies in the bloody soil of Honduras in an unmarked grave to this day, for the authorities refused to permit its removal.

Thus died General William Walker, King of Filibusters and Grey-Eyed Man of Destiny, the strange little jungle Napoleon who, before he was 36, drenched five countries in blood—the blood of his own men and that of the more than 15,000 enemy troops who died fighting against him—for the sake of a dream-empire he nearly made come true.

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SAVE THE EASY WAY... BUY YOUR BONDS THROUGH PAYROLL SAVINGS

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This is an official U. S. Treasury advertisement—prepared under auspices of Treasury Department and Advertising Council

$100 Monthly IF SICK or INJURED!

Plus HOSPITAL BILLS PAID!

AMAZING NEW

GOLD SEAL POLICY

PROVIDES All THIS PROTECTION FOR JUST

$1 A MONTH

CASH BENEFITS BIG ENOUGH To Be WORTHWHILE!

SICKNESS BENEFITS! Policy pays for loss of time due to sickness, a regular monthly income for as long as 3 months, up to..... **$100.00 PER MO.**

ACCIDENT BENEFITS! Policy pays for accident disability at rate up to $100 per month, for as long as 24 months, or **$2400.00**

ACCUMULATED CASH! Policy pays for accidental loss of life, limb or sight up to $4,000, accumulated to..... **$6000.00**

PLUS SICKNESS, ACCIDENT and MATERNITY HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

Policy pays "hospitalization benefits" for *sickness, accident* or *maternity*, including hospital room at rate of $5.00 per day, operating room, anaesthesia, drugs, dressings, laboratory, X-ray, oxygen tent and other services, *even ambulance service*. Total hospital benefits as specified to over..... **$650.00**

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.

451-A Service Life Building OMAHA 2, NEBRASKA

CASH for Almost Every Emergency!

Now, added millions can afford all-around insurance protection. Here is a combination SICKNESS, ACCIDENT & HOSPITALIZATION policy *for just a dollar a month* that pays in strict accordance with its provisions for ANY and ALL accidents, ALL the common sicknesses, even non-confining illness and minor injuries. It pays disability benefits from the very first day. NO *waiting period!* NO this is not the usual "limited" policy. It's an extra-liberal policy that provides quick cash to *replace lost income*, pay *doctor* and *hospital bills*, for *medicines* and other pressing demands for cash that invariably come when sickness or accident strikes.

POLICY ISSUED *By Mail* AT BIG SAVINGS!

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION!

Ages 15 to 69. Actual policy sent by mail for 10 Days Free Examination. NO cost! NO obligation! NO salesman will call! See this policy and judge for yourself. It's the protection you need and should have at a price you can afford. Just mail coupon below! But *do it today*. Tomorrow might be too late!

FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION COUPON

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.

451-A Service Life Bldg., Omaha 2, Nebraska

SEND without cost or obligation your extra-liberal "Gold Seal" $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 Days' Free Inspection.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....AGE.....

CITY.....STATE.....

BENEFICIARY.....